

PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | Xbox 360 | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro

SAINTS ROW

EXCLUSIVE

GTA: SAN ANDREAS IS BLOWN OUT OF THE WATER BY NEXT-GEN RIVAL

180 PAGES – IT'S OFFICIALLY A PROBLEM

PREVIEWED

SAINT'S ROW [XB360] CONDEMNED [XB360] THE OUTFIT [XB360]
KILLER 7 [GC/PS2] BLACK & WHITE 2 [PC] FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR 2 [PS2/XB/PC]


eMag

It's true, you know – the old cliché that it's the taking part that matters not the winning. games™ has been in the running for a few awards over the years, and as you can see, we occasionally win a few. Unlike some, we're not so egotistical that we believe we should bag every award that we're nominated for – for us, it really is all about the nomination, and to even be considered among the very best videogames magazines out there is more than enough.

However, we *did* win *MCV* magazine's Magazine Team Of The Year award again, which affords us a moment of out-of-character gloating. We'd like very much to think that this award is deserved, but if nothing else it cheered us up immensely. As such, we'd like to thank our readers for continuing to buy the mag, and the industry for once again recognising our continued endeavours – it really does mean an awful lot to us.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor





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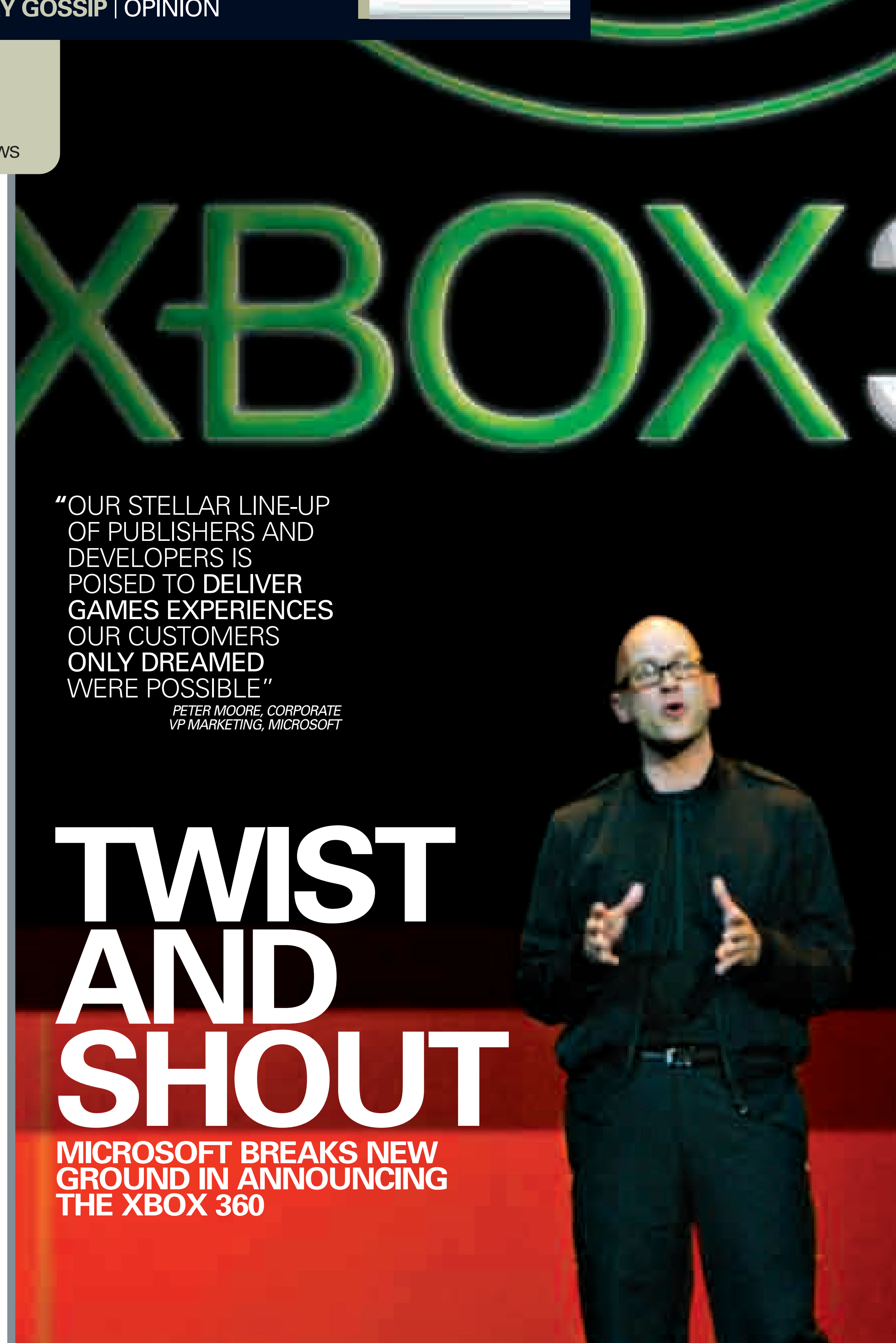
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FEATURES

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS



"OUR STELLAR LINE-UP OF PUBLISHERS AND DEVELOPERS IS POISED TO **DELIVER GAMES EXPERIENCES** OUR CUSTOMERS **ONLY DREAMED** WERE POSSIBLE"

PETER MOORE, CORPORATE VP MARKETING, MICROSOFT

TWIST AND SHOUT

MICROSOFT BREAKS NEW GROUND IN ANNOUNCING THE XBOX 360

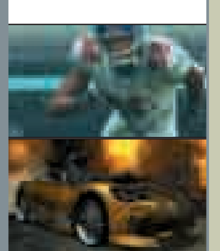
While Sony may be the name usually synonymous with the fusion of videogames and popular culture, Microsoft's unveiling of its new hardware has taken this to the next level – rather than treat the industry to a sneak peek of the Xbox 360, the American firm elected to present the next-gen console on a global scale. The half-hour MTV show (hosted by Elijah Wood and featuring fops du jour The Killers) gave the world a tantalising taste of things to come in a manner that many would not have expected from Gates' firm, but it looks as though this direction will be a popular one going into the next generation. EA has also gone straight to the consumer, with first media for the new *Madden* title being aired during the NFL draft on ESPN – after all, what better way to raise awareness of a product than to take the next-generation fight directly to those who'll be delving into their pockets to elect the victor?

And while Microsoft's decision to interrupt the usual console cycle with an early next-gen offering might have gamers and industry figures alike up in arms, the move has been picked out by analysts as a wise one. With a public eager to sample a new wave of bigger, bolder and (hopefully) better games, it's only natural to assume that uptake will be high; and with prices being estimated at the sub-$300 mark for the US market, we can see this kind of direct approach really paying off.

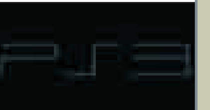
With more allegedly 'leaked' images finding their way onto the net on an almost hourly basis at the time of going to press, it really is time for the industry to call a plumber – not one that just collects coins, scoffs mushrooms and races karts, either. Microsoft's cunning viral marketing site ourcolony.net has been teasing visitors with snippets of info and peep-show images of games and hardware for several months now, and the web's best Photoshop monkeys have been making judging what's real and what isn't quite the chore for many forum junkies.

With the name now set as Xbox 360 (so as not to be seen to be a generation behind Sony's third PlayStation with 'Xbox 2') and imagery officially filtering out marginally later than our deadlines would permit, it'll be next issue's E3 coverage that really sets the scene for the hardware's November release. But if it's next-generation games you want – well, you've come to the right place…

Photo © Reuters



Xbox 360 promises a leap in graphical quality.



Sony's won this round of console wars, but the next?

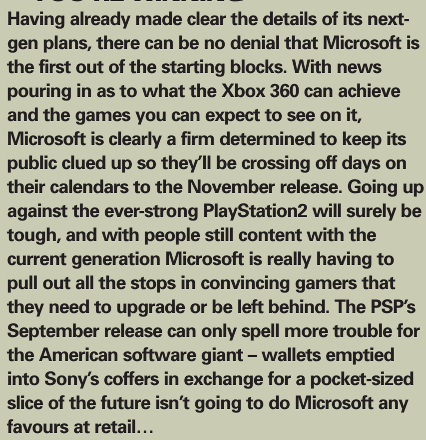


Mario needs something special to wow the crowds.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

WHAT DO THE BIG THREE HAVE PLANNED FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

MICROSOFT – SPIN WHEN YOU'RE WINNING



Having already made clear the details of its next-gen plans, there can be no denial that Microsoft is the first out of the starting blocks. With news pouring in as to what the Xbox 360 can achieve and the games you can expect to see on it, Microsoft is clearly a firm determined to keep its public clued up so they'll be crossing off days on their calendars to the November release. Going up against the ever-strong PlayStation2 will surely be tough, and with people still content with the current generation Microsoft is really having to pull out all the stops in convincing gamers that they need to upgrade or be left behind. The PSP's September release can only spell more trouble for the American software giant – wallets emptied into Sony's coffers in exchange for a pocket-sized slice of the future isn't going to do Microsoft any favours at retail…

ETA: NOVEMBER '05

SONY – THREE'S COMPANY…

It's 'Cell-this, Cell-that' going into E3, and with Microsoft having all but assured the world that its next-gen console will be the star attraction (besides the poor sap in the Master Chief outfit, naturally), it's going to take all Sony can do to draw attention away. Expect to see tech demos and new titles at the very least – there are several companies already touting PS3 games – and while Europe still waits on the PSP's September release, Los Angeles will be host to the next wave of releases. *Burnout Legends, Gran Turismo 4* and *Coded Arms* are all likely to be flying the handheld flag but all eyes will surely be elsewhere, ready to snaffle up whatever PlayStation3 titbits Sony is willing to leave out.

ETA: EARLY-MID '06

NINTENDO – (NOT) TALKIN' 'BOUT THE REVOLUTION

With E3 bustling with underpaid, overweight website writers as you read this, it's still a bit of a 'will they, won't they?' situation regarding Nintendo – rumours abound about the Revolution's control and game mechanics, and there's even talk of a true successor to the Game Boy being on show at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Whatever it does offer, it's going to be an uphill struggle for Nintendo to regain its console gaming crown, especially if it continues to rest on its laurels. If the Revolution doesn't manage to wow gamers without feeling too much like its gimmicky handheld cousin, it wouldn't be out of the question to see Nintendo just a few mistakes away from being forced down the Sega road…

ETA: MID '06

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SHOW AND TELL

By the time you read this, the Electronic Entertainment Expo – E3 to you – will be over. But you might like to know that this year's event was one of the busiest in recent years. According to show organiser the Entertainment Software Association, over 400 exhibitors showed off more than 1,000 game-related products, 81 per cent of which are set to be released by Christmas 2005. "The products debuting at E3 Expo 2005 are examples of the innovation and creativity that will drive industry growth in the coming year," said ESA president Doug Lowenstein.





COLOUR BLIND

It's always nice to have a console that's a little different. In fact, most systems have an alternate colour scheme or two to pick from, but sometimes it just gets silly. By the time you read this, the 'all-new' platinum slimline PStwo will be on sale in a store near you. Thank God for that, eh? In other news, the pink DS is now available in Japan – a move surely made to simply annoy all those who would have wanted a nice pink DS but purchased a boring silver one only a month ago. Why? We don't know. Grrr.



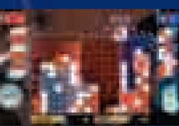


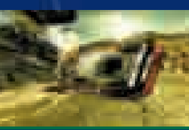
PORT SIDE – EUROPE HO!

SONY'S HANDHELD CONFIRMED FOR EUROPE AT LAST



■ Can key titles like *Mercury* lure gamers from the DS?





■ Concerns have been raised over the PSP's high price.

The PlayStation Portable will finally become available across Europe on 1 September, some nine months after its release in Japan and six months later than its chief competitor, the Nintendo DS. As with the US release – which saw initial hardware stocks sell out at a slightly slower pace than Sony first predicted – the PSP will be available as a single version value pack, featuring a 32Mb Memory Stick Duo, headphones and wrist strap. Also mirroring the American launch of the console, Sony will offer a free UMD of Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man 2* movie with the first wave of hardware shipments, though unlike the States (where the disc came package-bundled), consumers will be forced to register online at www.yourpsp.com in order to qualify for the freebie.

However, as expected, the price for the European market will be much higher than in other territories, weighing in at £179 (€249). Sony defended the cost on the BBC website, claiming high British VAT rates were to blame, and that US purchasers are subject to additional local sales taxes not included in the list price of $249 (£130). "This is not a case of rip-off Britain," said a Sony spokesman, probably aware that the increased price and lengthy wait will be enough to drive many prospective buyers to their local Grey Import emporium – especially since PSP games are not currently region coded, and that only movie UMDs feature regional restrictions.

So why the delay until September? Well, Sony's official line is that the company has been unable to produce enough units to satisfy customer demand before September, and was unwilling to disappoint consumers by initiating a drip-feed release for such an in-demand console. Additionally, a slow-burn launch would be unlikely to result in the headline-grabbing, DS-trumping sales Sony is doubtless looking for.

But another reason might well be the DS itself; having had such a head-start over Sony's technologically superior handheld, it has sold over 200,000 units in the UK alone (with sales tipping the five million mark worldwide). It's likely Sony has held back the PSP to both distance it from a head-to-head war with Nintendo's machine and attempt to draw some attention (and consumer cash) away from Microsoft's Xbox 360, which is likely to be released worldwide in either September or October, gaining a similar jump on the release of Sony's PlayStation3 hardware.

There are, nonetheless, benefits to the delayed PSP release. For one, the European market is likely to be treated to a far



Waiting for the likes of *WipEout Pure* and *Pursuit Force* is annoying, but the launch line-up in general should be pretty impressive.



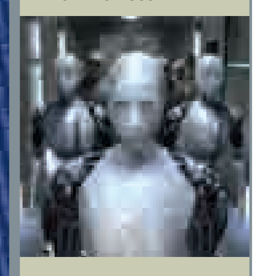
"SONY'S **OFFICIAL LINE** IS THAT THE COMPANY HAS BEEN UNABLE TO **PRODUCE ENOUGH UNITS** TO SATISFY **CUSTOMER DEMAND** BEFORE SEPTEMBER"

stronger software line-up at launch than its Japanese and US counterparts, with eagerly-awaited titles such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Burnout Legends* likely to be ready for first-day release across the territory. Additionally, having overseen the PSP's adoption into other markets, Sony can now project more accurately how the PSP will perform on these shores. With relatively slow uptake in the US snowballing into sell-out situations across the territory, we can but hope the Japanese firm isn't plagued by the shortages we've seen with the PlayStation2 – Sony will have ample time to prepare European stock before the launch in several months time (hence the delay) so anything other than a highly successful launch will surely come under serious fire.

At the time of going to press, figures hint at around 40 titles in the launch window as well as some 20 UMD movies – the US launch line-up was impressive, but if Sony pulls this off there can be little doubt that it'll be among the strongest console launches ever.

ON THE MOV(I)E

As well as the games, the PSP's ability to play UMD movies must rate among its more interesting and appealing features. Good news, then, that even more movie firms are looking into supporting the new Sony format. Buena Vista, Lions Gate and (unsurprisingly) Sony Pictures are already on board but three more industry stalwarts are investigating the potential of UMD. Universal and Paramount are both still in early stages of consideration while Fox looks closer to signing on the dotted line, bringing titles like *I, Robot*, *Predator* and *Napoleon Dynamite* to the palm of your hand. Frickin' sweet.





NOT ANOTHER...

PHANTOM STORY

FROM INFINIUM TO BEYOND FOR AT LEAST ONE VAPOURWARE TOP DOG

The confused and protracted release process for Infinium's aptly named Phantom online set-top console hit another stumbling block this month with the departure of the company's executive vice president of business development. Infinium was quick to play down the significance of Richard Skoba's resignation, suggesting his "pursuit of other opportunities" was to blame and that the company wouldn't "expect much disruption as a result of his departure." Infinium also declared that it would be "announcing a restructuring of its sales and distribution departments." So no disruption at all, then.

However, the announcement came just days after similar reports suggested that Infinium's president and chief operating officer, Kevin Bachus, had also left the company. Bachus responded to the claims stating that he was still "100 per cent committed to [Infinium's] mission to launch the Phantom game service later this year," and that the reports – which had erroneously alleged he would be heading up a new venture called IDV Global Media On-Demand – were a result of conversations the company was having in an endeavour to "explore new markets for [its] technology." And not at all an effort to let us forget the damn thing could actually exist.

Consider us set right, and bored rigid with the whole affair.



Data stream

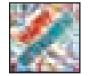
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BACK AFTER THE BREAK

Brace yourself – the next generation of in-game advertising is on its way, thanks to the formation of the world's first media network focused on maximising advertising opportunities in games. Made up of multiple companies the network says it offers a host of services to firms looking to advertise in games, using ad-serving technology that creates adverts between and during gaming sessions. So next time your reach for that console power switch, be sure to have your ad resistance turned up to 11…





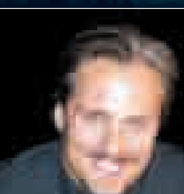
ONE SMALL STEP

After over 55 years with Nintendo, Hiroshi Yamauchi is ready to resign from the company's board of directors. The notoriously unpredictable and hard-nosed former Nintendo president will step down at the end of June, supposedly due to old age and the company's financial stability. Initially, Yamauchi handed the position of president to Satoru Iwata but retained his place on the board; now he will only serve as an adviser to the company, and has turned down a retirement benefit of around ¥1.5 billion, preferring to see Nintendo reinvest the money.

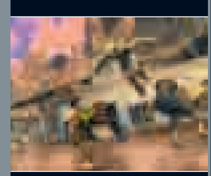


ODDWORLD INHABITANTS TO SHIFT FOCUS WITHIN THE GAMES INDUSTRY

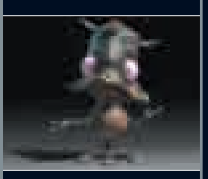
GOODBYE, ODD WORLD?



Oddworld's Lorne Lanning is taking his ball (well, studio) and going home.



Stranger's Wrath was a hit with critics but didn't sell too well.



Popular characters from *Oddworld* games could appear in CG movies.

Lorne Lanning, president of Oddworld Inhabitants, has decided to reposition his games studio as a multimedia company. However, Lanning has stressed this does not mean he's turned his back on videogames, as previously suggested.

The decision to shut down internal game development at Oddworld Inhabitants fuelled rumours that the developer would turn its back on gaming. Lanning arguably didn't help his cause with comments damning the lack of promotion for *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* but he was quick to set the record straight.

"I want to point out that we never said we are quitting the game business," explained Lanning. "What we said is that we are closing down internal game production at the San Luis Obispo studio. We are looking at new models beyond the current publisher/developer model and we want to focus primarily on IP development for massively multimedia properties.

"We are only leaving behind the model of the independent internal developer," he continued. "The current model between publishers and developers is broken. Yet the properties that we have created, and will continue to create, are designed to be viable games as well as viable movies and television, and there are a lot of production companies that will need viable content. 'Content' is the name of the game in entertainment media."

Lanning's frustration with the games industry lies with the fact that games are often entirely financed by one party, which leaves more eccentric ideas at the whim of a sole publisher. Films are multi-party investments with studios paying a percentage towards costs, leaving external parties to pick up the tab, and Lanning believes this approach fosters creativity.

One possible option for the reshuffled company could be an Oddworld CG movie leading to an Oddworld game. "Right now it's not our intent to go around and pitch publishers, which are the only people paying for videogames, on why a new *Oddworld* game is going to be great," Lanning said. "However, if the motion picture is green-lit first – and that's going to be with worldwide distribution – then it's easy to come back to the game industry and say, 'Look, this is the motion picture; this is the date of release; this is the marketing and advertising budget. So if you can get a game done in this amount of time that follows these constraints, then we can have a synergistic release.'"

"THIS INDUSTRY IS **DISCOURAGING INNOVATION** BECAUSE PEOPLE **DON'T WANT TO TAKE CHANCES"**

ATV3 AND INTERVIEW WITH A MADE MAN ACQUIRED

ACCLAIM GAMES REVIVED

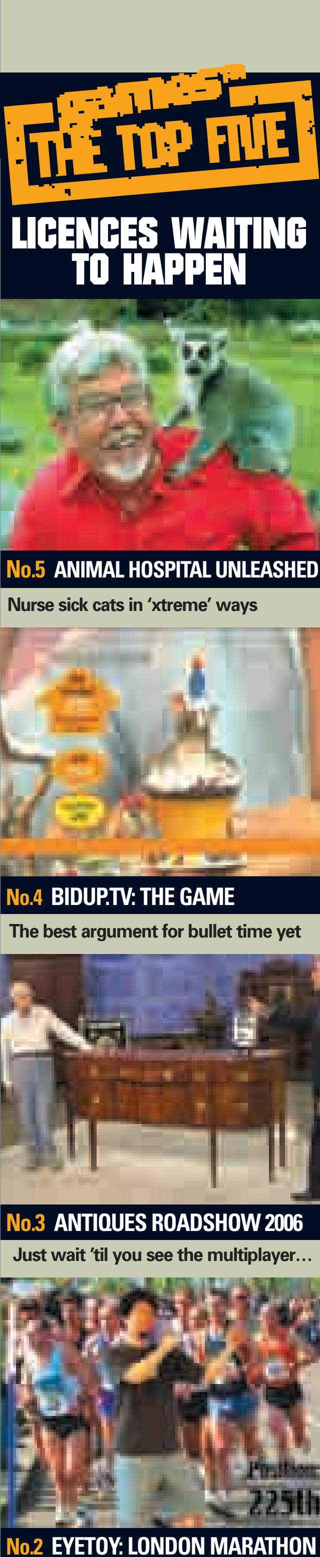
Fund4Games has announced that it has acquired, and is completing development of, two Acclaim titles, *ATV3* and *Interview With A Made Man*. The games were shut down when Acclaim went under late last year but they're now being completed and Fund4Games is seeking publishing partners for the titles. Fund4Games also worked on Acclaim titles *Juiced*, *World Championship Rugby* and *Urban Freestyle Soccer*, and is believed to be evaluating the worth of two further Acclaim titles.

"Acquiring the assets of Acclaim's European operation is a significant step for Fund4Games," said Tim Gatland, Fund4Games' chief executive. "*Interview With A Made Man* and *ATV3* are now being completed by a superb team and we're contacting publishers who may be interested in the titles."

Acclaim's Valiant Comics assets have also been sold, with ex-Marvel employee John Taddeo the only bidder for the licence that Acclaim used to produce games such as *Shadow Man*. Almost all Acclaim's assets have found new homes, with the last titles to be bought being *The Red Star* and *100 Bullets*. However, licensing issues mean these titles could be in limbo for some time.



Games like *Vexx* and *Turok* hardly helped the struggling Acclaim stay afloat.



games™ THE TOP FIVE

LICENCES WAITING TO HAPPEN

No.5 ANIMAL HOSPITAL UNLEASHED

Nurse sick cats in 'xtreme' ways

No.4 BIDUP.TV: THE GAME

The best argument for bullet time yet

No.3 ANTIQUES ROADSHOW 2006

Just wait 'til you see the multiplayer…

No.2 EYETOY: LONDON MARATHON

26 miles of running on the spot

No.1 GEOFF CAPES' BUDGIE TYCOON

Theme Park meets, um, Geoff Capes

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 32: 'A STORM IN EVERY PORT'

New hardware is awesome. There are few better feelings than reaching into your back pocket only to find that your hand won't fit thanks to a PSP-shaped blockage (this feeling is better still if it's actually a PSP), but the problems arise when a lot of the 'new' games seem all too familiar. While the star of the DS launch was an eight-year-old N64 game with slightly broken controls, the new handheld release schedules fill with remakes and ports at a frankly alarming rate. Alongside the likes of *Darkstalkers Chronicles* and *Ridge Racer* – reinventions of popular franchises – lie titles like *Ridge Racer DS*, *Tales Of Eternia*, *Ape Escape: On The Loose* and *Medievil Resurrection*, straight ports of older games with perhaps the odd 'enhancement'.

But where does it stop? Will *Gran Turismo 4* Mobile be significantly different to the PlayStation2 version so as to warrant forking out for both? Will the shelves quickly fill up with not just the same old brands but the same old games? Or will publishers and developers snap out of this mindset that we somehow want to play old games on new technology?

As games like *Metal Gear Ac!d* and *Ape Academy* prove, it is possible to keep a finger in both pies. Fingers crossed E3 will give us a glimpse of the first wave of truly great, truly original titles. Please?

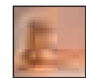


Tales Of Eternia – haven't we met before somewhere…?

WipEout Pure is a great example of an old series given new life.

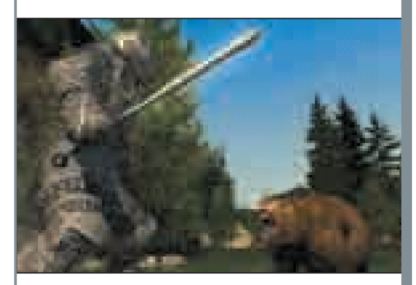
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HAMMER TIME

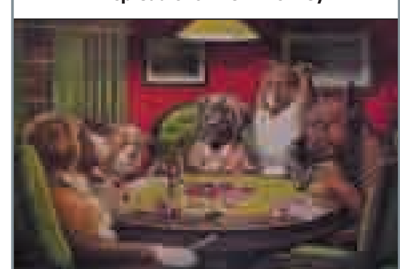
Auctioning off items earned from MMORPG frolicking has been an activity that's been going on for a long while now. But now Sony's seen a way that it can make a bit more coin from this harmless act and its popular title *EverQuest II*. Station Exchange is a service designed to give players a safe place to trade and auction off their items using real money and PayPal accounts. It all sounds harmless enough, but although Sony will not be offering any items itself, it will be relieving any users of a bit of cash just for the pleasure of trading there. Naughty Sony.





PLACE YOUR BETS

According to reports, the most popular aspect of internet gaming – online gambling – is set to double in size over the next five years. The industry, which already earns over $7.5 billion every year, is attracting interest from new investors thanks to the low cost of setting up and maintaining gambling websites. However, although an estimated 20 million Americans use online gambling sites, doing so is illegal in the US, and George W Bush is said to be keen to maintain the ban due to online gambling "threatening public morals and contributing to the spread of crime". Monkey!





THE DS FALLS INTO THE RUM-STAINED DOMAIN OF PIRACY

AND SO IT BEGINS...

After some tests of the DS's wireless capabilities revealed a few, shall we say, 'security issues', a group of technologically minded hackers have managed to take the first steps towards the seedy underbelly of the industry. Links have emerged on the internet to a brand new Flash cartridge that will play not only GBA and DS games but also a variety of other file types; images, text files and web pages will be viewable and a number of other ROM files for relatively simple systems such as the Game Gear and NES will also be readable. But while the device may have been created for the honest good of the homebrew scene, there can be little doubt as to its nefarious potential.

The whole issue of pirating commercial games has, of course, been the topic of much conversation. Like the GameCube's shrunken discs, DS cartridges still seem like a fairly safe format to avoid being broadsided by illegally copied software. But it's elsewhere that developers' work might not be so safe – the *Polarium* demo available wirelessly has already been ripped and it seems like this will just be the beginning of something bigger.

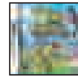
With homebrew versions of commercial titles already surfacing and Flash carts with the same capacity as DS games themselves, it only needs someone to develop a way to siphon the data off the commercial carts before Nintendo has real reason to worry. But when we say 'only', understand that this is a far from simple task and it will be some time before the Neo Flash kit becomes more of a worry to Nintendo than existing GBA equipment.

With the PSP's memory stick boot options (not to mention the loopholes that allow Java games to be played), we can't see it being too long before Sony's handheld becomes just another 'X' on a treasure map to digital buccaneers. Even now, it's incredible to see what's possible within the usually legit homebrew circles for the DS. A primitive and cut-down version of *Donkey Konga* has already appeared and while the game may not be up to much, 'amateur' programmers have started proving that they can use the touch screen for their own ends, if nothing else.

"THE DEVICE MAY HAVE BEEN CREATED FOR **THE HONEST GOOD OF THE HOMEBREW SCENE,** BUT IT HAS **HUGE PIRACY POTENTIAL"**

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DS = DOING SUPERBLY

So, hands up who thought the Nintendo DS would fail miserably? Well, you're all wrong – recent figures announced by industry bodies NPD, Media Create and even Nintendo itself indicate that over five million units of the DS were sold worldwide between the handheld's Japanese launch last year and the European launch in mid-March. The announcement, which also celebrated over 200,000 DS handhelds being sold in the UK since its release, puts Nintendo well within range of its prediction of between five and six million units being sold before the end of its financial year (31 March); something that Sony's PSP has failed to do, having sold only 2.5 million of the forecasted three million units.





There'll be new faces on the high street soon.



NEW GAMING CHAIN BECOMES BIGGEST IN AMERICA

BOUTIQUE BOUGHT

GameStop has bought its retail rival, EB Games, to become the biggest game-store chain in America. In a deal that cost $1.44 billion, the two companies will join together under the GameStop name. Although technically a takeover, the decision was met with mutual approval on both sides. The nearest rivals will be Wal-Mart and Game Rush but GameStop will now control 25 per cent of the market.

"This transaction makes a tremendous amount of sense from an operational, cultural and synergistic perspective," said EB Games CEO Jeffrey Griffiths. "We will now be in an even better position to broaden our reach and generate further efficiencies for our business and our customers."

GameStop chairman R. Richard Fontaine was also waxing lyrical about the potential strength of the company. "We are merging these two companies from a position of strength," he said. "This merger… will enable us to enter new international markets and allow us to compete more effectively in the highly competitive US videogame industry."

These 'new international markets' include Europe, as plans to open up to 3,200 stores in the US are backed up by the intention to create a further 600 stores in Europe and Australasia. No changes to the new GameStop organisation are planned until 2006 when store closings will take place "when appropriate". This suggests we can expect the first European GameStop stores to appear in early to mid-2006, when consumers may benefit from increased high-street competition between major game retailers.

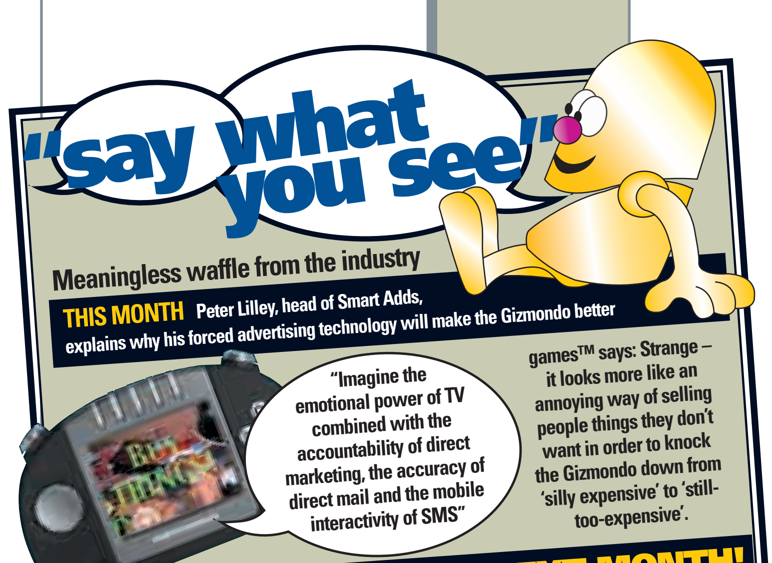
KONAMI CASTS OFF

ALL TAKARA SHARES TO BE SOLD

Konami is to sell all its shares in toy maker Takara, ending the five-year alliance. Konami came to its decision after reviewing Takara's performance. With the toy firm struggling, Konami was worried its performance would affect group earnings and moved to protect its own interests. A buyer hasn't yet been named for Konami's 22 per cent stake in Takara, which amounts to an estimated ¥11 billion.

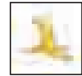
This news came towards the end of a frantic April for Konami, a month that saw the company also snap up three million new shares in *Bomberman* creator Hudson Soft, making Konami the majority shareholder.

Hudson Soft suffered a torrid financial year in 2005, making a loss of $69 million (£36.1 million) and seeing the resignation of its co-founder, Hiroshi Kudo. The company promptly sent an SOS to Konami, which stepped in to become the majority shareholder.



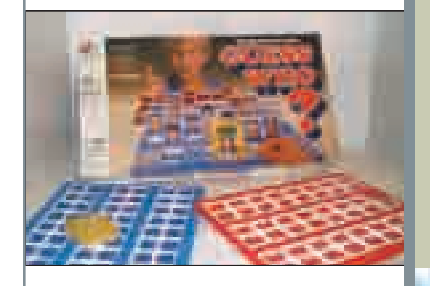
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THE NAME GAME

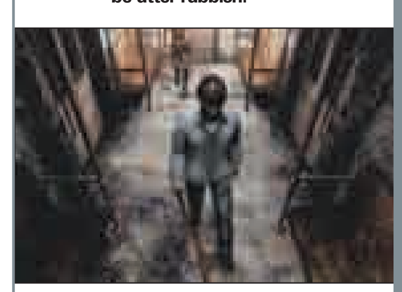
Everyone makes mistakes – even us. But, unfortunately, our mistakes are more noticeable, especially when such a mistake happens to be getting someone's name wrong. Those of you reading our Community feature about Gearbox Software in issue 30 might have read and enjoyed what Marc Tyler had to say… or at least, you would have done if Gearbox's director of marketing wasn't actually called Marc Tardiff. Needless to say, we're incredibly sorry about the mix-up, if only because we like to pride ourselves on getting such things right, and it definitely won't happen again. Cross our hearts and everything.





SCARY MOVIE?

According to a report in US entertainment paper *Variety*, filming has begun on the movie based on Konami's popular *Silent Hill* franchise. *Pitch Black* star Radha Mitchell will play the lead character, Rose, who is stupidly searching for her even stupider missing daughter in the creepy town of Silent Hill – it's all going to end in tears. Boasting a budget of $45-50 million and with other big names such as UK villain actor Sean Bean, Deborah Kara Unger and Kim Coates, there's a slim chance that it might not be utter rubbish.





We hate to be harbingers of doom, but is the Gizmondo going the way of the C5?





AD-HEAVY GIZMONDO LOSES A FEW POUNDS

PRESSURE DROP

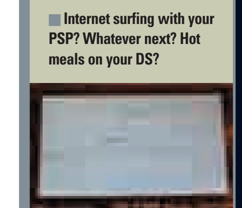
Gizmondo can do anything, if its marketing tagline is to be believed, and that includes finding £100 to slash off its price. The Smart Adds version of the handheld currently retails at £129 alongside the older, full-price version, but the clue to the price drop is in the title. Smart Adds is the new feature that accounts for the £100 price cut, delivering up to three advertisements a day to your Gizmondo.

These advertisements include discounts and location-based offers, using the unit's GPS feature to direct customers to the nearest vendor of the advertised product. It's a move that's already courted controversy but should help relieve some of the pressure placed on Gizmondo by Sony's European PSP release announcement.

Meanwhile, Gizmondo Europe will open a further 21 stores around the world to complement its flagship store on London's Regent Street. Gizmondo is aiming to have a store in every exclusive area of each major city, such as Times Square in New York, with each shop following the blueprint of the flagship store in London.

"The performance of the London store has far exceeded our expectations, so much so that it's no wonder other gaming platforms have followed our lead," said Tiger Telematics chairman Carl Freer, neglecting to mention what these other gaming platforms actually are. "The new Gizmondo stores will be opening over the next 12 months, starting with New York's Times Square, which is one of the most highly prized retail locations in the world."

The other locations for Gizmondo stores include Las Vegas, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Paris, Monte Carlo, Milan, Hamburg, Barcelona, Luxemburg, Dubai, Capetown, Rio de Janeiro, Stockholm, Beijing, Shanghai, Moscow and, er, Birmingham and Liverpool.



Internet surfing with your PSP? Whatever next? Hot meals on your DS?

WIPEOUT PURE LOOPHOLE EXPOSED

PSP GOES ONLINE?

Eagle-eyed PSP users have been able to access the internet via *WipEout Pure*'s download section, fuelling rumours that the PSP could eventually have full-blown internet access.

The loophole was exposed after someone realised the Download section in *WipEout Pure* fetched a download.jpg from the game's website. Using that snippet of information, hackers have been able to circumvent PSP coding and set up their own portals to get the internet up and running on their PSP. It's a complicated procedure requiring in-depth knowledge of HTML, DNS servers and IP addresses; in layman's terms, the trick is getting the PSP to access your server that's set up to look like the *WipEout Pure* download picture.

While there are some strict technical limits on what this homebrew internet browser is capable of – no big webpages, no frames – it can play Java games and access smaller websites. Sony has yet to respond to this breakthrough but it's perhaps taking this news lightly in the knowledge that it's a lot of work for little reward. The generally incestuous nature of the hacking community is also working in Sony's favour – despite posting their findings, hackers have otherwise shown little willingness to help the less able make their PSP internet enabled.



It's the latest in a series of PSP hacks, including how to get eBooks on your PSP and, more recently, DVDs. Details of how to use the '*WipEout Pure* trick' can be found at http://omlette.net/psp/roto/.


eMag



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"GIVEN THAT TO USE A PSP ON A TRAIN IN ANY URBAN LOCALE WHAT DOES EVERYONE WANT TO DO WITH IT BESIDES IMPRESS

Hey everyone – the emperor isn't wearing any clothes…

The headline: 'Sony delays PSP Euro launch'. Normally I'd be having a ball with that little nugget there. 'We've got it, you don't' – that kind of thing. I don't in all honesty know, however, that you are missing out this time. Certainly, members of the community dependably decreed as sensible have been going loopy with PSP mania. I literally cannot escape its mention.

Sony's tantalising TV commercial is shot from the perspective of the gadget's 16:9 screen staring out at the world, beginning with being packed into the shipping box by an Asian face, then waking up in the States where it is passed joyfully between the excited young faces of metrosexuals. Still, Sony must be smug in the knowledge that most of the constant PSP bombardment is not generated directly by them but rather, as with the iPod, by a rolling storm of cultural awareness that permeates pub talk, news segments, celebrity sightings and all the rest.

I was in a game store a day or two before launch. A child of about ten was at the counter with his mother, grasping eagerly at a flat, laminated piece of card attached to a chain. "Wow!" he said, "This is actual size!" He moved thumbs and fingers frenziedly over the buttons, or where they would be on a real PSP. "Oh yes, this," said his mum. "Why is it so much better than the – what do you call it – DS?" The boy dispensed with all earthly notion of technical specifications and said simply, "It just is".

He was likely one of the 620,000 customers who bought a PSP during its first week on sale in the US. I see the product on every shelf yet I am not tempted. Clearly there is something wrong with me. To this cynical soul, it feels like a step backwards. So, in the simplest possible terms, it's basically got PS2-type power, right? But at drastically lower resolution with tinny sound and just one analogue stick. Given that to use one on a train in any urban locale would be inviting misfortune, what does everyone want to do with it besides impress the odd skirt in Starbucks?

People are playing them in their homes! People I know! So where is the advancement that influenced $250 out of your pocket? Could you not simply sit several paces away from a television playing PlayStation2 instead? You are largely playing *Ape Escape*, *Ridge Racers* and *WipEout*, after all. Also, am I the only man in the world who thinks battery fed consoles should be entirely solid state? One thing Sony has proven indisputably is that it makes some fruity goddamned disc drives. My PlayStation spent more time on its back than Paris Hilton. The UMD drive brings smaller parts, batteries, pocket lint, motion and contortion into play. There's a red sign in my head with the word 'AVOID' written on it.



WOULD BE INVITING MISFORTUNE, THE ODD SKIRT IN STARBUCKS?"

Odd flashes of genius – *Lumines*, *Mercury* – intrigue, but are those system sellers? Air travel is the most boring thing I ever have to do. I loathe it. The great expanses of inactivity demanded by international flight stretch before me in indescribable torment. As it happens, I've got a long plane ride ahead of me in the next few days. Freely admitting that the PlayStation Portable bears an ever-beckoning über-gadget design aesthetic, I figured okay, let's see what it can do, I'll get one with a copy of *Mercury* to keep me busy on the journey… so long as its music capabilities mean I can leave the iPod at home.

I've been so disinterested in the new handheld generation that I'd never taken note of specs such as the bundled memory stick. Thirty-two megabytes. With a couple of game saves that's well under half an hour of my lovely LAME encoded MP3s. Reasonable MP3 support requires a 1Gb memory stick, the biggest and therefore most expensive currently available, for a couple of hundred songs. At the end, I'm back where I started; unaware quite what it is besides good looks that has driven the American populace PSP mad. I just hope that the major next-gen announcements – imminent at the time of writing – capture enough hearts and minds that I get some peace from hearing about the littlest PlayStation.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

My old Marshall



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Project Greenlight 3



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

ABERCROMBIE AND FITCH



For those who want to appear laid-back enough to shop in a thrift store without ever actually having to suffer the indignity of handling used clothing, God made Abercrombie & Fitch. All articles have been beaten and crushed into fraying rumpled lumps of attire, hanging heavy with that oh-so-world-weary droop that makes it look like you've been around, or done anything in fact besides drive around in your dad's convertible listening to Gwen Stefani.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	PS2
2	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	Xbox
3	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Xbox
4	Doom 3	Activision	Xbox
5	Unreal Championship 2	Midway	Xbox
6	God Of War	SCEA	PS2
7	Gran Turismo 4	SCEA	PS2
8	Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	Atari	PS2
9	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	PS2
10	MX vs ATV Unleashed	THQ	PS2

(Updated 30/04/05)



Midnight Club 3

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"JAPAN IS A COUNTRY THAT'S DISPLAYED SAVAGE AND QUICK PHILOSOPHY. IT'S ALSO READY TO BURN ITS OWN CULTURE FOR

In 1867, American Navy men with too-curly beards reclined on the decks of gunboats and fired cannonballs at Japan's Yokohama harbour for no good reason. They probably thought it was funny. A day later, the American 'hero' Commodore Matthew Perry screamed at a frightened Japanese man. The screaming said this: Japan, you'll give us silk when we come back here in one year or we'll do what we just did, only we'll do it harder. The translator was, of course, a Dutchman.

Japan did not want to become a modern nation. Yet it did. Within one year, Japanese men started trimming their own beards, dressing in suits and sending diplomats all over the world. Those diplomats endured a long voyage home to bring back many things, including fuzzy memories of French Catholic schoolgirls' uniforms, and we thank those fuzzy memories even today, especially in the Saizeriya family restaurant in Ikebukuro, just across from the Toshima Ward Public High School at four o'clock on a Friday afternoon.

It was during this era that Japanese men began to forget about the geisha and start dreaming about high black socks and pleated skirts. It was also during this era that a famed British scholar walked into a bookstore in Asakusa – once the centre of old post-feudal Japan – and bought a monumental stack of crinkly old ukiyoe (wood-block prints depicting samurai warriors, kabuki actors or ladies of the night) for roughly ten pence, and then proceeded to fill several museum galleries with them. Those museum galleries still stand.

Japan is a country that has displayed, on several instances, savage and quick turns of artistic design philosophy. More importantly, it is a country that's ready to burn its own culture at the stake for a pair of good leather shoes (see 'The shock of the old'). It is with humble regret, then, that I announce that the beat-'em-up-flavoured remake of Sega's old-school strategy RPG *Shining Force*, called *Shining Force Neo*, was panned by even the love-everything Japanese critics.

I'd like to think it's because of this that Mega Drives and their games became morbidly cheap within two weeks of *Neo*'s release. Treasure's *Gunstar Heroes*, once averaged at ¥5,980 in Akihabara, is now an affordable ¥1,980. Treasure's *Yuyu Hakusho* fighter, once more than ¥19,000 and always propped up within glass display cases, is now a flabbergasting ¥5,800. I managed to score a copy of it without an instruction manual for just ¥2,100. Now this is getting ridiculous. A new Mega Drive console will only cost me ¥2,900 at the right shop.

Why did this happen? There are two possibilities, one being that the tides of retro games have changed; just as the Japanese used to favour the crazed Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of the generals who fought in the great wars depicted in *Samurai Warriors* and



TURNS OF ARTISTIC DESIGN A PAIR OF LEATHER SHOES"

Kessen, around World War II-time, they now favour the businessman-like Oda Nobunaga. Nintendo has begun a wide-scale operation to bury all remaining old Famicom units, their games and their controllers; it does this by making everything more expensive, and by releasing only 10,000 copies of *Super Mario Bros* for the Famicom Mini Game Boy Advance series, which drove the price from ¥2,000 to ¥6,000 in a week. Sega's method of vanishing is a little different. Last week, the husk that was once the good ship Mega Drive started to sink. I can continue to honour its memory by playing the best damned four-player fighting game of all time.

The other possibility? Well, maybe Treasure is finally getting around to releasing that Treasure Box compilation. If that's the case – well, I'm kind of glad I own the cartridge, anyway. Maybe I'll donate it to a museum when the Treasure Box is released. Probably a museum in Indiana; definitely not one in Japan.

Kind regards



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTY TWO	HOW TO NOT FIND SHOES
Anou desu ne, kutsu wo kaitain dakedo.	So yeah, I was thinking of buying some shoes.
Kashikomarimashita. Saizu wa ikutsu deshouka?	Your wish is my command. What might your size happen to be?
Sanjuuissennchi desu kedo.	Well, 31 centimeters.
Arienee! Kuso dekee, kono gaikokujin no ashi!	No ***kin' way! Get a load of the huge feet on this foreigner!!
Amerika dattara futsuu desu kedo…	Well, it's normal in America…
Amerika dattara futsuu, tte? Fuzakennayo! Keisatsu wo yobu zo!!	"Normal in America"? What the hell is that supposed to mean?! I'll call the cops!!

THE SHOCK OF THE OLD

There's a rumour that in the late 1870s a monk who happened to own the famous five-storey pagoda in Asakusa sold it to a Western businessman for a pair of leather shoes. That pagoda was later burned down during an American firebombing raid in 1944, and rebuilt by different Americans during the restoration of Japan in 1949. It is now a celebrated symbol of Japan's old age, and it draws in thousands of Chinese tourists a day, who take their own pictures in front of it.

I showed that pagoda to game producer American McGee the other day, and when I told him its secret – that it wasn't 'real' – he scoffed and said, "How could they build that in 1949?" My reply was simple, and quick: "How did they build it in 1404?" His reply was merely "Aha!"

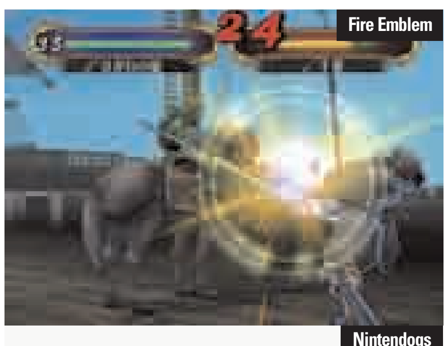
Mr. McGee, producer of the *Alice* game and that on-hiatus *Wizard Of Oz* title, is making a game set in Tokyo; it will be released for PC sooner or later. He lives in Hong Kong, and was in Tokyo to meet me and be shown around. What all our wandering has to do with his upcoming game, I can't be sure.

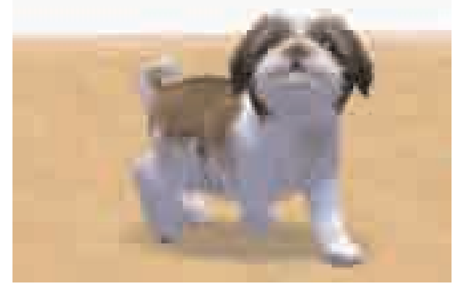
It's worth noting, as I noted to McGee, that the Japanese would never make a game "about Tokyo". In Japanese comics set in Tokyo, names of train stations are always obscured; the city is made fictional. McGee seeks to create a realistic Tokyo, and then set fantastic events in it. I'm looking forward to seeing the result.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Romancing SaGa: Minstrel Song	Square Enix	PS2
2	Fire Emblem: Souen no Kiseki	Nintendo	GC
3	Naruto: Saikyou Ninja Daikesshuu	Tomy	DS
4	Nintendogs: Shiba & Friends	Nintendo	DS
5	Nintendogs: Dachs & Friends	Nintendo	DS
6	Nintendogs: Chihuahua & Friends	Nintendo	DS
7	Baseball Live 2005	Namco	PS2
8	Mega Man Zero 4	Capcom	GBA
9	Mobile Suit Gundam: 1 Year War	Bandai	PS2
10	Tokyo Xtreme Racer: ZOC	Genki	PSP

(Week ending 24/04/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)


Fire Emblem


Nintendogs



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

ONLINE AND UPWARDS



At the end of 2004, online record sales overtook physical discs for the first time. Will the same happen in games? Yes! It's desirable and inevitable. The only surprise is that it hasn't happened already.

There are some hurdles to overcome before this can happen on consoles – the bandwidth needed for large games hasn't been around long and hard disks are still a novelty – but why hasn't online distribution taken off with PC games, where everything is already in place?

We still have the ridiculous situation where games like *World Of Warcraft* require the player to go into a shop and buy a boxed copy. Why are PC games sold on physical media at all? The code is invariably out of date and has to be patched online, yet we have to pay for the cost of this useless disk's production and distribution. On top of that we have to pay for the overheads of the retailer and distributor – all money lost to the games industry.

It's understandable why traditional publishers aren't rushing into online sales: smaller publishers can't risk upsetting the almighty distribution and retail machine for fear of being locked out of the limited shelf space before an online alternative is established, and the big publishers are reluctant to undermine the distribution systems they've built up, which give them their commercial advantage.

So the online revolution will start on the industry's outskirts. Developers are looking to break free from the restrictive business practices and creatively stultifying environment traditional publishers offer, and they are looking online. Valve's pioneering Steam shows that big products can be sold successfully over the internet, and at the grass roots level the 'indie' scene is beginning to take off.

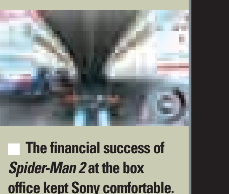
STE PICKFORD, INDUSTRY VETERAN

FROM THE FRONT

SONY SUFFERS A LOSS BUT IS STILL GOING STRONG, WHILE ANOTHER BRITISH DEVELOPER BOWS OUT

UPS AND DOWNS

SONY'S FINANCIAL REPORT REVEALS SOME WORRYING FIGURES



The financial success of *Spider-Man 2* at the box office kept Sony comfortable.

As predicted by many analysts, Sony's recent announcement of its Q4 fiscal data for 2004 revealed heavy losses. The Japanese technology firm reported its biggest loss of two years, a net loss of ¥56.5 billion (approximately £281 million), although Bloomberg analysts had predicted a fall of closer to ¥70 billion (£348 million). The poor performance has been attributed to the falling price of flat-panel televisions and personal audio devices although the heavy costs of PSP production and the acquisition of MGM can't go unnoted.

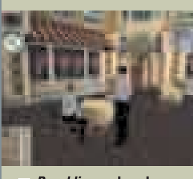
But this figure isn't exactly telling of Sony's post-Christmas period in gaming. Revenue from its games sector was up a whopping 75 per cent on that time last year (the Japanese PSP launch must take much of the credit for this rise). Similarly, operating losses were also down on last year's figures, *Spider-Man 2* did superbly well, and Sony Ericsson reported pre-tax takings that were up by an incredible 470 per cent on the previous year. Not such a bad year after all…

But Sony needs to focus on the future. With the US PSP launch all but guaranteeing growth in the first quarter of the new financial year (which takes us to the end of June) and the European PSP launch in September, Sony's handheld should bring in substantial funds, even while income may be fluctuating in other areas. Music was most significantly hit, dropping some 63 per cent on last year's figures, but with shares having dropped 76 per cent from a record high in March 2000, the only way is up for Sony.

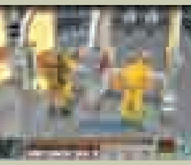
"THE **POOR PERFORMANCE** WAS ATTRIBUTED TO THE **FALLING PRICE** OF FLAT-PANEL TELEVISIONS"

NO MAGIC POTION FOR ELIXIR STUDIOS

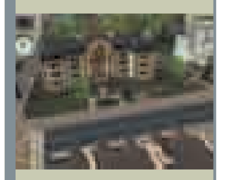
EVIL SCHEMES CAN'T SAVE UK DEVELOPMENT HOUSE



Republic was hugely ambitious but wasn't a big hit with gamers.



Evil Genius was frankly ace, so the lack of a sequel is a big disappointment.



Things are looking bleak for the good ol' British developer as yet another closed its doors earlier this month. Elixir Studios is the company in question this time and the announcement was made following the cancellation of one of its key projects. The developer, which had recently signed a £1 million funding deal, was working on several games including an unnamed title that was due for release some time in 2006 by a major US publisher.

"We gave it everything we had but ultimately it wasn't quite enough," said Elixir founder Demis Hassabis. "Today's games industry no longer has room for small independent developers wanting to work on innovative and original ideas. Perhaps there is no… need for them."

Arguably the worst thing to come out of this is that we are now very unlikely to see the sequel to top RTS *Evil Genius* that the company was working on. Guess we'll have to get our evil fix elsewhere…



Electronics:
Sales Q4/03 1,147.4
Sales Q4/04 1,172.4
+2.2%

Game:
Sales Q4/03 126.7
Sales Q4/04 222.1
+75.3%

Music:
Sales Q4/03 105.0
Sales Q4/04 39.2
-62.7%

Movies:
Sales Q4/03 236.6
Sales Q4/04 190.6
-19.4%

Financial Services:
Sales Q4/03 152.1
Sales Q4/04 156.1
+2.6%

Other:
Sales Q4/03 70.0
Sales Q4/04 69.2
-1.1%

GAMELOFT RINGS IN SOME IMPRESSIVE FIGURES

MOBILE MONEY

As if proof were needed that the humble mobile phone is becoming an ever more popular way to play games, the mobile games specialist GameLoft has announced its figures for the first quarter of 2005, revealing a growth in revenues of 146 per cent.

This won't be the first time the company has been celebrating this kind of success. In fact, it's no surprise at all that the business has seen such positive figures. These latest results mark the eighth straight quarter in which it's enjoyed a three-figure growth. The bulk of the company's business – roughly 60 per cent – is still coming from Europe, but the new figures also show that demand is becoming greater in North America; it looks likely that US gamers will soon be playing on their mobiles just as much as us. GameLoft – part of the Guillemot family's business empire – now has over 1,000 staff worldwide, and has set a target of 70 per cent overall growth for 2005 – a target that shouldn't prove too much of a problem given its recent success.

Gaming on the go is now more popular than ever.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	Multi
2	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	Multi
3	FIFA Street	EA Sports BIG	Multi
4	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Multi
5	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	PS2
6	Doom 3	Activision	Xbox
7	Jade Empire	Microsoft	Xbox
8	World Championship Snooker 05	Sega	Multi
9	Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30	Ubisoft	Multi
10	The Punisher	THQ	Multi

Clearly, today's videogames market is all about 'chav' culture – no sooner does *FIFA Street* drop from the top of the chart than *Midnight Club 3* zooms in to take its place. Next month: EA's 'Burberry Wearer 4' to be released in a store near you…

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 23 April 2005)


Midnight Club 3
Lego Star Wars
Jade Empire

RELEASE LISTS


God Of War PS2 Flailing blades, raging demons and huge combos. Where do we sign?

Black & White 2 PC Giant creatures abound to do your bidding. Sweet.

Untold Legends: Brotherhood Of The Blade PSP Hack-and-slash fun with not enough buttons to go around.

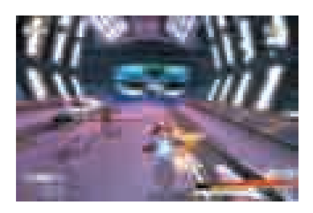


games™ MOST PLAYED

WIPEOUT PURE

Format: PSP
Publisher: Sony

Be it Wi-Fi multiplayer or the brutal solo skill tests that are Rapier and Phantom classes, you can pretty much guarantee that there'll be at least one PSP running *Pure* in the office at any given time. We simply can't get enough of Sony's futuristic racer – the downloads can't come soon enough.



TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts

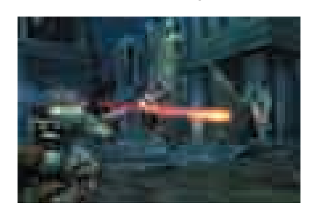
Every bit as good online as it is offline, the *TimeSplitters* series comes good again with a fast-paced shooter that renders *Halo 2*'s Live silliness practically irrelevant. Give us dual Flare Guns over Master Chief's rubbish excuse for dual wielding any day.



GOD OF WAR

Format: PlayStation 2
Publisher: Sony

We will finish God mode. We will finish God mode. We will finish God mode. No, really. After the finger athletics of *Devil May Cry 3* on Dante Must Die mode, we've fallen into the trap of thinking we're good enough to clear Kratos' adventure on the toughest setting. More fool us.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '05			
20 May	Area 51	Midway	
20 May	Cold Winter	Vivendi	
20 May	Juiced	THQ	
27 May	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
27 May	Alien Hominid	Zoo Digital	Wanted
27 May	7 Sins	Digital Jesters	
27 May	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted
27 May	BloodRayne 2	Vivendi	
27 May	MotoGP 4	Sony	
JUNE '05			
03 June	SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	
10 June	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	Electronic Arts	
10 June	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
17 June	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Novalogic	
24 June	Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder	Empire	
24 June	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Batman Begins	Electronic Arts	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	God Of War	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Bomberman Hardball	Ubisoft	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	
TBC	FarCry Instincts	Ubisoft	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Killer7	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2	Capcom	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts 2	Buena Vista	Wanted
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	Worms 4: Mayhem	Codemasters	
TBC	187: Ride Or Die	Ubisoft	
TBC	Total Overdose	SCi	
TBC	Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Phantom Kingdom	Koei	Wanted
TBC	Sly 3	Sony	
TBC	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	Wanted
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	Without Warning	Capcom	
TBC	Crash Tag Team Racing	Vivendi	
TBC	Beatdown: Fists Of Vengeance	Capcom	
TBC	Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Black	Electronic Arts	



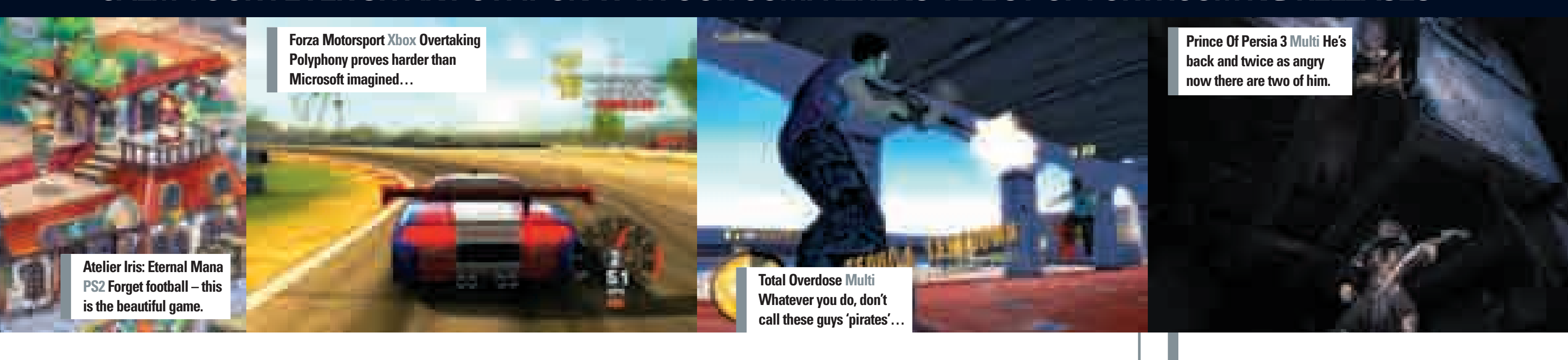
GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '05			
03 June	Donkey Konga 2: Hit Song Parade	Nintendo	
10 June	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	Electronic Arts	
24 June	Killer7	Capcom	Wanted
24 June	Batman Begins	Electronic Arts	
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Zelda	Nintendo	Wanted

XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '05			
20 May	Area 51	Midway	
20 May	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Novalogic	
20 May	WWE WrestleMania XXI	THQ	
20 May	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
20 May	Juiced	THQ	
20 May	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
27 May	Worms 4: Mayhem	Codemasters	
27 May	Alien Hominid	Zoo Digital	Wanted
27 May	BloodRayne 2	Vivendi	
JUNE '05			
03 June	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
10 June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Wanted
10 June	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	Electronic Arts	
10 June	MotoGP 3: Ultimate Racing Technology	THQ	
10 June	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
24 June	Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder	Empire	
24 June	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
24 June	Batman Begins	Electronic Arts	
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	Wanted

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana PS2 Forget football – this is the beautiful game.

Forza Motorsport Xbox Overtaking Polyphony proves harder than Microsoft imagined…

Total Overdose Multi Whatever you do, don't call these guys 'pirates'…

Prince Of Persia 3 Multi He's back and twice as angry now there are two of him.

TBC	187: Ride Or Die	Ubisoft	
TBC	FarCry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Total Overdose	SCi	
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Without Warning	Capcom	
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '05			
20 May	Area 51	Midway	
20 May	Boiling Point: Road To Hell	Atari	Wanted
20 May	Dungeon Lords	Dreamcatcher	
20 May	Domination	Dreamcatcher	
20 May	Singles 2: Triple Trouble	Koch Media	
27 May	7 Sins	Digital Jesters	
JUNE '05			
10 June	Codename Panzers: Phase Two	Koch Media	
10 June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Wanted
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Batman Begins	Electronic Arts	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	
TBC	Total Overdose	SCi	
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
TBC	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Spartan: Total Warrior	Sega	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Rise And Fall: Civilizations At War	Midway	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '05			
03 June	WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	Wanted
10 June	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	
24 June	Madagascar	Activision	
24 June	Fantastic Four	Activision	
24 June	Mario Party Advance	Nintendo	
24 June	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	Take 2	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Elf: The Movie	TBC	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
01 September	PSP Hardware	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Gran Turismo 4 Mobile	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Death Jr.	Konami	
TBC	WipEout Pure	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Smartbomb	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	World Tour Soccer	Sony	
TBC	NFL Street 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ridge Racer	Sony	Wanted
TBC	NBA Street	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ape Escape: On The Loose	Sony	
TBC	Untold Legends: Brotherhood Of The Blade	Sony	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors	Koei	
TBC	Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix	Activision	Wanted
TBC	NBA Street Showdown	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Twisted Metal: Head-On	Sony	
TBC	FIFA 2005	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Lumines	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	
TBC	Need For Speed Underground Rivals	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Tiger Woods 2005	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Infected	TBC	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe VFX Battle	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Wanted

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '05			
27 May	Need For Speed Underground 2	Electronic Arts	
JUNE '05			
03 June	Ridge Racer DS	Nintendo	
TBC	Pac Pix	Nintendo	
TBC	Kirby: Canvas Curse	Nintendo	Wanted
Q2 '05			
TBC	Meteos	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars 3: Battle For Omega Land	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Cadaceous	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh: Nightmare Troubadour	Konami	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Scratch!	Capcom	
TBC	Sonic DS	Sega	
TBC	Super Mario Bros DS	Nintendo	
TBC	Vandal Hearts	Konami	Wanted

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



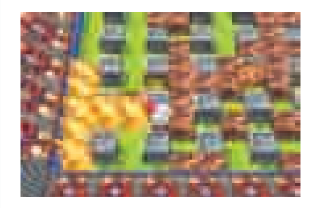
KATAMARI DAMACY 2

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: TBC
After being initially saddened that the first game wouldn't be coming to Europe, the announcement that the rolling sequel might find its way here is infinitely better news. Roll around, pick up all the things and make the biggest ball of stuff ever. In other news, the King Of All Cosmos is the coolest game character ever.



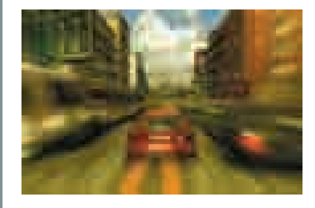
BOMBERMAN

Format: DS
Publisher: Ubisoft
With the helmeted dude taking up Hardball and puzzle games on other formats, we're pinning all our hopes on the DS version for our multiplayer fix. So, Hudson, if you even consider making us use that silly little pen to blow each other up, there's no Christmas card for you this year.



BURNOUT LEGENDS

Format: PSP
Publisher: Electronic Arts
This generation's finest racing series goes handheld in a move that – as expected – impresses every bit as much on the Sony portable as you could ever have hoped. We just need to get our hands on *Pro Evo PSP* and we'll finally be able to leave the house once more. Bring it on.





He's just a mean yellow mother from outer space **Alien Hominid – GameCube [The Behemoth] 2004**



HOMINID2
5
∞
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305
SMILEY
BUS



"THIS IS A NEXT-GEN GAME. THE WHOLE WORLD IS ENTIRELY DYNAMICALLY LIT IN REAL TIME. YOU SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR A HUGE JUMP IN VISUAL QUALITY"
JACQUES HENNEQUET, SENIOR PRODUCER, VOLITION

CREATING AN **XBOX 360 LAUNCH** TITLE? YOU'VE **JUST GOT TO ROW** WITH IT...

SAINT'S ROW

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Volition
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

■ Use any means necessary to expand the Saint's Row territory. Recruit homies, mow down rival gangs and – most importantly – make sure you dress well.

HISTORY

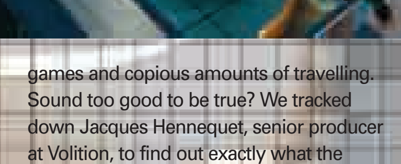
■ Being an Xbox 360 launch title, *Saint's Row* is to be one of the first examples of what the machine can do. It's all looking very promising at the moment.

Champaign, Illinois, is a strange little place. Not just because it closely resembles one of the stereotypical Stateside neighbourhoods that we've been force-fed by many a tacky US TV series, nor because – judging by the number of them lining the streets at least – the carwash seems to be one of the more profitable business ventures you can set up. No, it's the weather. Admittedly, it's normally considered a bland topic of conversation, but not in this case. Last time we were in this neck of the woods the conditions were Arctic. This time? Well, we could barely breathe thanks to the intense heat and unforgiving sun. Still, we were prepared to endure such harsh conditions in order to catch the first ever glimpse of Xbox 360 launch title *Saint's Row* – a game of warring gangs, plentiful crime, bling and respect. A bit of sub-tropical weather wasn't going to melt our enthusiasm...

Hang on, though. Warring gangs? Crime? Bling? For even those with the most limited recollection abilities this may all seem a little familiar. The *GTA* series has now quite rightfully risen to become one of the greatest franchises ever and along the way has created a genre all of its own. This is where *Saint's Row* fits in. And while there may be plenty of similarities, this is looking to be a different breed. The sprawling, fully explorable environment, an unhealthy obsession with ever-popular acts of street crime and a few other shared notions aside, *Saint's Row* doesn't seem to have as much in common with Rockstar's monster as you might think.

It's obvious that Volition is setting out to improve on the tried and tested formula that seems to have taken the gaming world hostage by streamlining the whole affair and delivering not only a title that plays better than anything like it but also concentrates solely on the core gameplay elements associated with the genre rather than interrupting proceedings with mini- ▷





games and copious amounts of travelling. Sound too good to be true? We tracked down Jacques Hennequet, senior producer at Volition, to find out exactly what the developer's got in store for us.

"You may see a few similarities but this really is something new," he says. "We wanted to create an open-world type of game where you decide exactly what you want to do and do in any order you want to rather than get funnelled into a very linear experience. There are 13 different types of activities that can be performed just about anywhere in the city. You can go to any neighbourhood and take part in anything. We have street racing, pimping, drug dealing and escort activities among others. If you like to do a lot of racing then you can concentrate on that area and build respect in that area that way; as you earn respect you'll trigger the mission that can earn you neighbourhoods. The story is divided into four separate storylines and this is what allows us to let you go anywhere and let you trigger them in any order."

Size is an important issue here. When *Saint's Row* meets with the bulk of the comparisons to *GTA* that will soon be on their way, something that many of the more blinkered fans are bound to leap upon is the significantly smaller play area that *Saint's Row* offers when stood back-to-back with the mighty *San Andreas*. However, we feel any criticism of this aspect of the game is likely to fall flat very quickly. Something Volition is keen to point out is that the smaller play area is an important gameplay feature and not a result of a lack of effort or time. (This is an Xbox 360 launch title, after all, and it's clear to us that had the game required the map to be twice the size of *San Andreas*' it damn well would have been.)

"We feel that certain other open-world games were just so big that you ended up spending the bulk of your time going from point A to point B – that's not fun," Hennequet tells us. "We took a long hard look at other games in this genre and said

RIGHT BACK AT YA

The *Saint's Row* world isn't just going to let you strut around without a fight. Start letting bullets fly in the middle of the street and anyone in a vehicle is going to try to run you down. Rival gangs will constantly push to reclaim their territory should you leave it unguarded, and the police will be all over you if you start committing crimes in broad daylight. This idea of the world "pushing back" is something of which Volition is very proud and it will be interesting to see to what level this is achieved. It's already looking pretty good.

"THE CITY IS ENTIRELY STREAMING. THERE ARE NO LOADS ANYWHERE. NOT INDOOR, NOT OUTDOOR, NOWHERE"

JACQUES HENNEQUET, SENIOR PRODUCER, VOLITION

GOING LIVE

***Saint's Row* is set to have a whole rack of online options. Six different game modes are planned at the moment, and although it hasn't been revealed what form these modes will take we've been told that you'll be able to create clans for online battles. The thought of creating your own 'posse' online and having your entire Friends List 'representing' alongside you is an interesting one – and one that's likely to result in much treachery and, overall, fun. Suffice to say, we're looking forward to this.**

RESPECT PROFILE

■ Respect is quickly becoming as important as health bars and continues in videogames. It seems that if nobody respects you then you simply have no friends, which eventually leads to you taking on a mass of people who have much respect, and your subsequent bitter defeat. Rubbish.

HISTORY

- **SAINT'S ROW** 2005 [Xbox 360]
- **JUICED** 2005 [Multi]
- **NFSU2** 2004 [Multi]

"IT'S CLEAR THAT HAD THIS GAME REQUIRED THE MAP TO BE TWICE THE SIZE OF SAN ANDREAS' IT DAMN WELL WOULD HAVE BEEN"



■ Popping caps will become a way of life once you adopt your new street persona.

■ Waving a gun around ensures you get the maximum discount at most stores…



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Volition is located in Champaign, Illinois, about 130 miles south of Chicago and is best known for bringing us the *Red Faction* series. Before the company was known as Volition it was Parallax Software and was responsible for *Descent* and *Descent 2*.

HISTORY

- **THE PUNISHER** 2004 [Multi]
- **RED FACTION II** 2002 [Multi]
- **SUMMONER** 2000 [Multi]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

I WON'T WALK 500 MILES

SAN ANDREAS - TRAVEL + ACTION = SAINT'S ROW

■ Typically, some hot ladies will want to discuss politics and theology with you.

A LITTLE RESPECT

The idea of earning respect is a concept that has already done the rounds, and it's not limited to one genre. But it looks as if *Saint's Row* will be doing it better than we've seen before…

HEY, GOOD LOOKING

Looks are everything when you're trying to claim neighbourhoods as your own, and even from the very start you'll be able to create your character in your own lovely form. Whether the look of your face will directly affect how other characters in the game feel about you is unlikely, but you can be sure that the technology tucked up inside the Xbox 360 will allow you to create the most lifelike 'you' that has ever appeared in a game.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

How you go about things will change the way characters see you. A shop is an obvious place to buy items, but why buy when you can hold the cashier at gunpoint and rob them? In fact, why not just wait until it's dark and break in? Each of these options will feature their own pros and cons, but to have such a wide range of options even in such simple circumstances could make *Saint's Row* a winner.

HE AIN'T HEAVY

Only the most respected kids get the chance to recruit members into their crew, and in order to impress you'll have to make sure you have the right clothing and reputation. If you fail to represent you'll end up fighting all on your lonesome. "There are two types of homies in the game," Hennequet tells us. "The regular ones that you can just walk up to in the street and recruit by having enough respect, and we also have five special unlockable homies that all have their own abilities. These will be very valuable."



that we would make a world that's not too huge. Don't get me wrong, it is a big world – bigger than *Vice City*, to give an example – but we've tried to concentrate gameplay into an area that isn't overly large."

If proof were needed that the size of the play area isn't relied upon as heavily as it has been in Rockstar's titles, the game will also feature a teleportation system that you can use should you wish to cut down on your travelling time even further. This will certainly appeal to many, as we'd argue that any action fans who claim to enjoy 20 minutes of commuting between missions are blatantly fibbing.

"You can get to any of the neighbourhoods very quickly using the L-train teleport system," Hennequet says. "But you can also hijack the train if you want and there are some points where you can even derail the train to create some massive havoc. Our save system will also allow you to restart almost immediately without any backtracking. No-one wants to keep re-watching the same cinematics"

As you may have figured by now, gang warfare is what *Saint's Row* is all about.

"WE'RE LOOKING AT A GAME FULL OF WARRING GANGS, PLENTIFUL CRIME, BLING AND RESPECT"

We live in a time where owning a small portion of city simply won't do if you're in possession of a handful of homies, and in order to expand your urban empire you need to take out your rivals. The acquisition of new turf is made possible by two fairly well known methods: the much loved and often practised violent way, which involves a plentiful supply of guns, ammo and manpower, and the building of respect to a point where previously antagonistic rivals fall at your feet when met with your overwhelming presence and simply hand over their territory.

As well as these familiar elements, Volition has ensured that there are plenty of ideas that have been enhanced well beyond anything we've witnessed recently. "We have a large number of radio stations much like other open-world games," Hennequet tells us. "There's a primary focus on hip hop, but we're taking this a stage further. For example, the commercials you hear on the radio station actually tie into the world and have a meaning. For example, you may hear a commercial for a car sale saying 'if you get to this store in the next five minutes we'll give you $1,000 discount on a blinged-up vehicle'. If you get there in time, you will receive that discount."

It's looking like the first batch of 360 titles certainly aren't going to disappoint. The look on the developers' faces proved without a doubt that they know that they've created something special. "The Xbox 360 has it all," Hennequet says. "The whole world will be entirely dynamically lit in real time, there's no more baking of the lighting, time passes, there'll be a weather system and the use of the Havok 3 physics engine. [There'll also be] extensive use of rag doll and we have the whole battery of next-gen shaders including normal mapping, bump mapping, reflection mapping… You should be prepared for a huge jump in visual quality."

Well, we are. Are you?

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II



■ Look! TIE Fighters! In space! It's almost enough to make you smile. Almost.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ROUND TWO – FIGHT!

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT + SPACE + JEDI = STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

"STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II TAKES THE BEST-SELLING STAR WARS VIDEOGAME OF ALL TIME ONE IMPERIAL-WALKER STEP FORWARD"

LUCASARTS PRESS RELEASE



LICENCE PROFILE

As whored-out a licence as you're ever likely to find in the videogame world, we can at least take solace in the fact that for every three bad *Star Wars* games, there's one that's actually really enjoyable and fun – not a great balance by any means, but then we always knew that the Dark side was stronger than the Light.

HISTORY

- **SW: ROGUE LEADER** 2001 [GameCube]
- **SUPER STAR WARS** 1992 [SNES]
- **STAR WARS** 1983 [Arcade]



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Pandemic
RELEASE: Autumn '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-24 (PS2) 1-32 (Xbox/PC)

CONCEPT

It's all about fighting in the *Star Wars* universe on land, in the air, in space, and online on foot and in vehicles. Now with the Force.

IT'S A LOT LESS CLUMSY THAN THE LAST BLASTER

During the final scene of *A New Hope* Luke, Han and Chewbacca walk down an aisle to receive their medals to the sound of triumphant music. "Wanker," mocks a member of the Rebel Alliance played by a cocky extra. True story, but not one told by George's sound mix. Play *Star Wars Battlefront* online and there's a good chance you'll hear it too. Perhaps you'd just detonated a remote by a friend's base. Or maybe Darth Vader just destroyed your entire squad and there was nothing you could do but curse.

Play *Star Wars Battlefront II* and you can play as Darth Vader, or any of a number of units gifted with the Force. You can kill and be killed, and the power of hokey religions will be yours. Improvements to the game have been made almost as if Pandemic has been listening in to criticisms from headsets across the planet. While this is a true sequel rather than a patch, the additions seem more necessary than they are luxurious. It's still, however, set to be most impressive.

Expansion is the key to *Battlefront II*. More players can compete online, more character classes, expansive battlespace – battles that start on one ship can rage through to a hangar and be taken out into space, through to the hangar of an enemy ship where dismantling of defences can take place on foot. This game has space and it's got space from all six movies. While it's clear LucasArts wants to promote *Episode III* locales like the lava world of Mustafar as being important touchstones in the 12 new zones, it's the inclusion of a scrap on the Tantive V Blockade Runner and the partially constructed Death Star that will get old timers breathing hard.

Pandemic has already demonstrated its respect for what fans want with the 'Jabba' download for the original game. It's also shown that you can make the dedicated smile simply by adding details like a finely animated Hutt even when the level isn't best suited for co-ordinated assaults. This, however, doesn't mean that you can expect only cosmetic additions here. The single-player game now involves more than capturing bases and features open-ended mission objectives, and the Force can be used at key moments to affect battles.

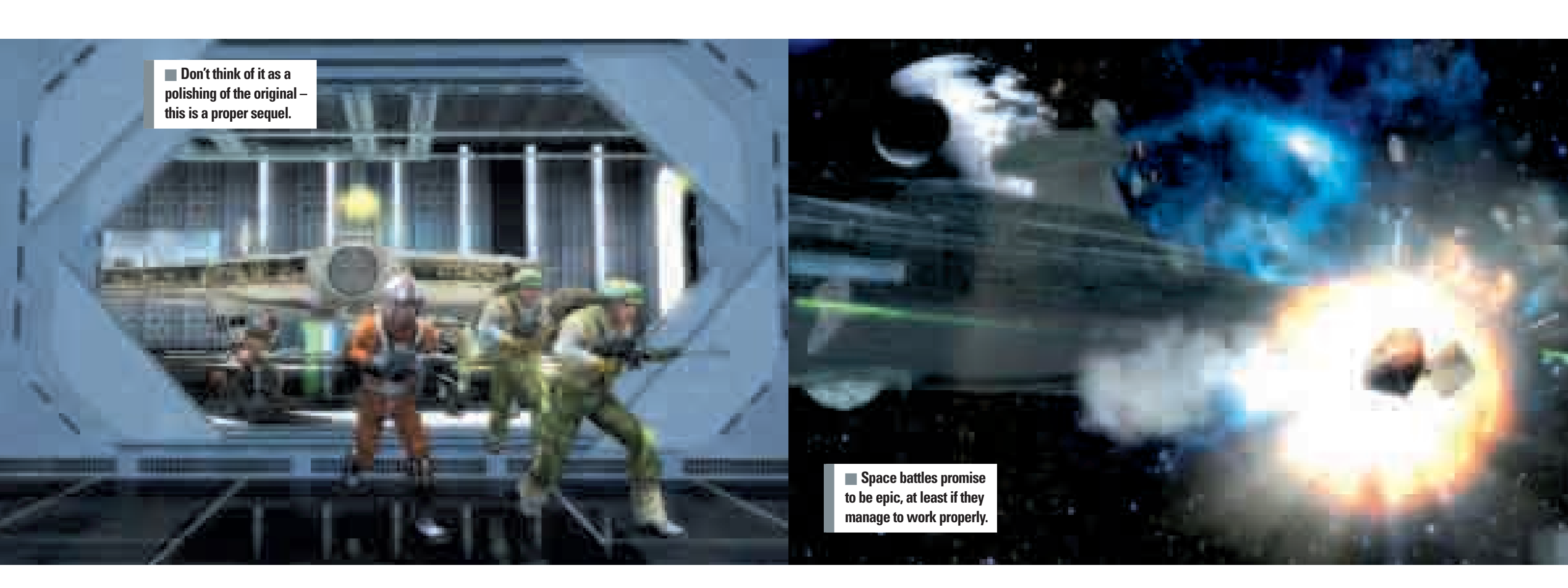
But *Battlefront* remains a superior experience online than off, and this second outing will ship with more ways of setting up and monitoring multiplayer games than before. This is a social experience as much as a competitive one. It's all-out galactic war, and it's cosplay where 30-somethings can copy over memories of Boba Fett swinging on a piece of wool with an experience their younger selves would expect of the 21st Century. And that means the ability to create battles how they want, rather than how a few options may allow.

The sceptical were right to state that a lot of the original game's charm was in its pillaging of the *Star Wars* fancy-dress box. *Battlefront II* is designed to still their tongues by answering any "wouldn't it be great if…" and "why can't you" questions with answers painted across a vast and beautiful canvas.

> "BATTLEFRONT II WILL SHIP WITH MORE WAYS OF SETTING UP AND MONITORING MULTIPLAYER GAMES THAN BEFORE"

NOT THIS CRUDE MATTER

***Battlefront II* will feature 12 new locations from the *Star Wars* universe, which begs the question: what's left to take? We've thought long and hard to come up with the conclusion that there must be a battle set on Dagobah. This swamp world would represent one of the slowest maps possible to negotiate due to it being based on gnarled roots, mud, roots, mud and roots. Only when a character trained with the Force raises Luke's X-Wing out of the skank will a single-fighter dogfight be possible and… no, that's ridiculous. Looks like Lucas will need to make his two new *Star Wars* TV shows just to provide locations for new games. We look forward to the Pinewood Studio level of *Battlefront III*.**



Don't think of it as a polishing of the original – this is a proper sequel.

Space battles promise to be epic, at least if they manage to work properly.

KILLER7

SEVEN HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

PS2 **With the shelves of game shops currently packed with many 'samey' titles, a bit of originality is becoming increasingly hard to find.** Sifting through the 50 or so WWII real-time strategy games in an effort to find a half decent one is a daunting task, and trying to sneak by the seemingly endless stealth titles (each 'enhanced' with more bullet time abilities than the last) is nigh-on impossible.

Fortunately, we're sometimes treated to something different, and it's usually our friends over in Japan who are responsible. *Killer7* is looking likely to be one of these 'different' titles and, after throwing a good few hours of our lives at the game, we predict it's going to be a million miles from most current game-store fare.

Killer7 has one of the most surreal concepts we've ever heard of. Lead character and old man extraordinaire Harman Smith is a wheelchair-bound assassin who spends most of his time unconscious, which allows his maid to slap him around a bit while she's meant to be looking after him. He sounds rubbish, but the reason for his constant sleep is what makes this game so interesting.

Harman can awaken any of his seven personalities to do his bidding and these projections are far from rubbish. Each has their own abilities and personality; some aren't even aware that they're part of Harman's subconscious and believe they are an actual person. Others are people that Harman has killed in his younger years and – for some reason – they've ended up inside his head. Yup, it's weird, but it's the kind of weirdness that just slips away while you're playing.

Also aiding *Killer7*'s uniqueness is its visual style. Cel-shaded anime is what you'll be looking at for the most part, a look that suits the game perfectly and complements the movie feel that the cut-scenes and titles create – it's all very pretty.

The way in which your characters are controlled is another aspect that's likely to surprise those who are used to the classic interpretation of action adventuring. Holding down a single button will see your character making their way along a pre-set path through the level with the stick only being used when a choice in direction is available. If at any time you hear the shrill, maniacal laughter of a Heaven's Smile follower you have to switch to first-person mode, scan the area so the invisible blighters can be seen, then try desperately to launch enough lead into them to prevent them from reaching you and ripping you apart with an explosion.

To distract from the action, *Resident Evil*-style puzzles will be scattered around. Nothing particularly taxing: lighting candles in a particular order, collecting elemental rings and turning sprinkler systems on and off will merely provide breaks and force you to backtrack a little to mop up areas that you may have rushed though. Hopefully, this won't be taken to the level of some of the later *Resident Evil* titles and have you traipsing around environments for hours just to unlock a door.

This is certainly one of the more complex titles we've seen of late and the only way we'll be able to answer all our questions about it is to get our hands on some finished code – something all seven of us are looking forward to.

"THE CEL-SHADING COMPLEMENTS THE MOVIE STYLE THAT THE CUT-SCENES AND TITLES HELP CREATE"

DETAILS

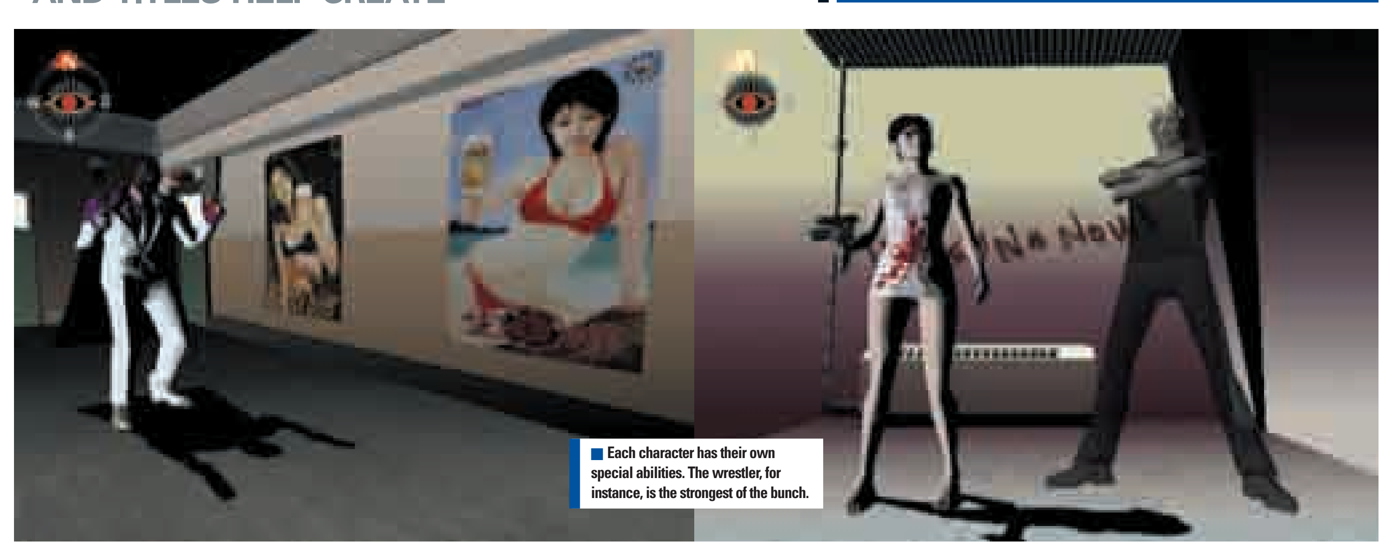
FORMAT: PS2, Cube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Grasshopper Manufacture Inc
RELEASE: July '05
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

By using each of your seven personalities, you must attempt to put a stop to the evil psychopaths that threaten the world.

THE BLOOD OF MANY

Blood is going to play a large role in *Killer7*. With each cackling loony you defeat you'll be rewarded with an amount of blood that relates to how difficult the enemy was. You'll then be able to use the collected blood in a number of ways. With each vial you manage to fill with claret you'll be able to replenish a small amount of energy whenever you feel the need, but the majority of your blood will be used to power up your character's attributes and unlock new moves. Unless you like retracing your steps and hunting down the respawning enemies, there won't be enough blood to power up all seven characters, so you'll have to decide where your blood will be best spent and where your own skills lie.



Each character has their own special abilities. The wrestler, for instance, is the strongest of the bunch.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Grasshopper Manufacture is a Japanese multimedia house. Founded in March 1998, this Capcom-run studio is responsible for some of the most original titles we've ever laid eyes on. The company currently only employs a staff of 20 and is based in the lovely city known as Tokyo.

HISTORY

- **MICHIGAN** 2004 [PS2]
- **FLOWER, SUN AND RAIN** 2001 [PS2]



The retro sound effects that accompany each death remind us of times of old.

As modern as the visuals look, the game still manages to keep a gritty feel.

"A UNIQUE CONTROL MECHANIC AND STUNNING POSTMODERN VISUALS DELIVER A TRULY UNIQUE EXPERIENCE"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IN SEVEN MINDS ABOUT EVERYTHING

PERSONALITY x SEVEN - SANITY = KILLER7

BLACK & WHITE 2



"I'D SAY FORGET ABOUT OTHER CITY-BUILDING GAMES; THEY'RE BORING, THEY'RE OLD, THEY'RE NOTHING NEW"

PETER MOLYNEUX, LIONHEAD

■ That cow is way happier than the Laughing Cow from the telly – it's the obvious choice.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

AN ALTERED BEAST

BLACK & WHITE + BETTER MONSTERS + COMBAT = BLACK & WHITE 2

■ Your oversized creature has far more abilities than a regular animal. Normal animals would be dull.



LEGEND PROFILE

Peter Molyneux is one of the best-known names in the international world of computer games. He co-founded Bullfrog Productions in 1987 and created a new genre of computer games – the 'god game' – with the release of *Populous*. Since then he has been responsible for many hugely successful titles including *Powermonger*, *Theme Park* and *Magic Carpet*.

HISTORY

- **THE MOVIES** 2005 [Multi]
- **FABLE** 2005 [PC]
- **BLACK & WHITE** 2001 [PC]



Your creature may look cute to start with but you can soon turn him to the dark side if you wish.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Lionhead Studios
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: God Sim
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Assume your role as a god and influence your people with the aid of a giant creature. Whether you're an evil or benevolent ruler is up to you.

THE WAR BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL RAGES ON

Playing God is a fine thing, though we feel it must be a fairly difficult thing for a team of developers to emulate. It's a far cry from creating a driving sim or a game where you're tasked with running a chain of coffee houses. If you're going to deliver the feeling of being a god, you have to do it right. When *Black & White* was released in 2001 it was on the money. Rather than just giving us the power to shape landscapes and torment populations, it let us do exactly what we'd do if we were a real god: create giant creatures that stomp around the land doing our bidding.

As with the previous *Black & White* title, a large element of this follow-up will be the morphable gameplay, which allows you to be either an evil or benevolent deity. Which of these paths you choose will shape most of the game for you and will directly affect your creature's looks, your armies and even the way your villages develop.

Somehow – being the fun-loving people we are – we find that evil always seems to come out on top in these situations. You manage to create a flicker of that much talked about 'fuzzy feeling inside' by ordering your creature to move around some timber so a team of stranded sailors can build a boat and take to the seas once again. But then the lure of hurling giant boulders at their new ship as they sail away becomes far too great and, as they sink and meet with their inevitable death, your creature develops slightly longer fangs as a set of demonic horns starts to blossom atop its head. Splendid.

What we're looking at with *Black & White 2* is a sleeker and more in-depth experience than the last game provided – no small thing considering exactly what the original entailed. New training and customisation options are available for your chosen creature (from the look of the screens available, it looks like we'll be opting for the overly happy cow), larger maps, better looking and more populated villages, and a much wider selection of Epic Miracles to inflict upon your land.

The area that looks to have seen the most improvement is the combat. Whereas before this was mostly a simple affair of storming into a village and overrunning it, you'll now be able to take part in full-scale wars with new army types, weapons and equipment becoming available depending on your alignment and your abilities. This could well be the making of the game, as setting huge armies against each other is certainly going to be one of the more interesting aspects of being a deity, and with all these new features it looks like the only people who'll be losing out are those goody-goodies who just want their subjects to sow seeds and pick fruit in a peaceful manner – like that's ever going to happen.

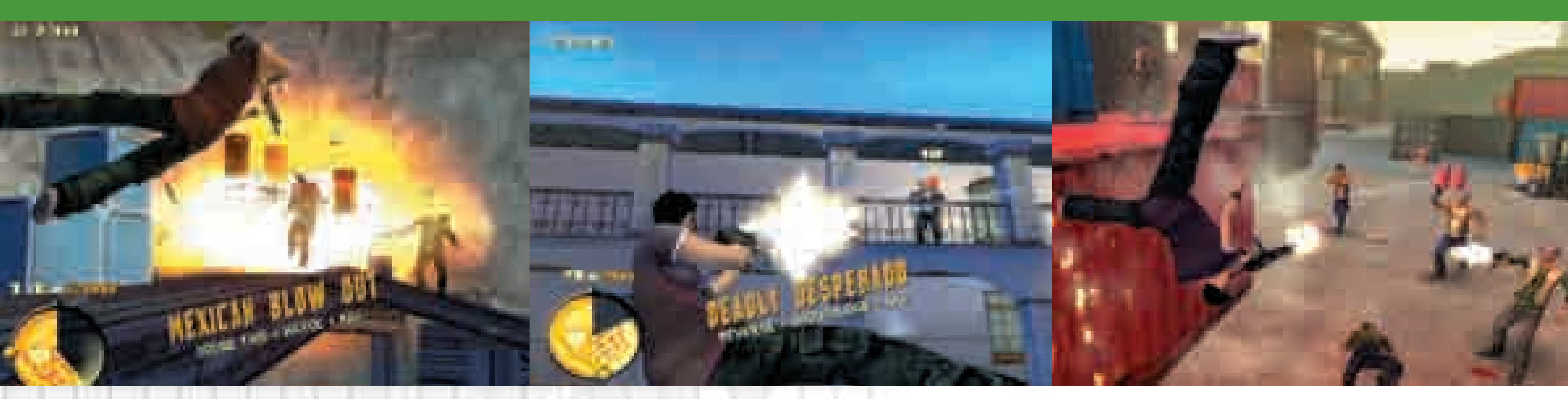
> "IT'S WHAT WE'D DO IF WE WERE A REAL GOD: CREATE GIANT CREATURES THAT STOMP AROUND THE LAND DOING OUR BIDDING"

Something that we are disappointed about is the lack of multiplayer options. Warring villages and awesome creature clashes are fine, but this sort of thing is always better when you're friends with the owner of the giant monkey you're beating with a chunk of mountain. Despite there being no plans to include any multiplayer options when the game is launched later in the year, Lionhead is obviously well aware of what it's potentially missing out on and it's been suggested that an add-on may become available later to accommodate those with a thirst for their friends' monkey blood.

A BIT OF AN ANIMAL

As mentioned in the main text, the combat in *Black & White 2* has been given quite an overhaul, and easily the most interesting aspect of this is the part your creature will play in your battles. Whereas before your creature would merely either storm in ahead to give people a bit of a fright or hurl around a few miracles to give your forces the edge, it will now play the vital role of leading your army. This idea could present a number of new tactical features that should have been included in the first title. Let's just hope that Lionhead gets it right and doesn't waste this opportunity.

TOTAL OVERDOSE



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Deadline Games
RELEASE: July '05
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Faced with dodgy DEA men and an army of Mexican goons you've got to shoot with style to succeed in this OTT gunfight.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Stealth is an over-used and often underplayed subtlety found lurking in the shadows of many recent shooters, but hide no more, friends, because *Total Overdose* is one of the most shamelessly over-the-top action games we've seen.

If you need to know what's going on, you're released from jail to avenge the death of your DEA agent father and to help out your brother, whose own crappy attempt at vengeance left him in a wheelchair. But who cares about the wafer-thin plot? It's simply gringo-killing time in Mexico and, as an American, you don't get asked for ID.

However, *Total Overdose* is not just about shooting back, it's about doing it with style. Sure, you can complete a mission by killing a couple of guys in sombreros and taking down the big boss with a well-placed headshot but it's points that win prizes and keeping it simple just doesn't cut it.

In essence, you should approach *Total Overdose* as a beat-'em-up with guns: learn some moves, pick up some special attacks and then go combo crazy. The left trigger throws you into a slow-motion dive that looks both cool and ridiculous at the same time, but from which you can earn more points, and holding down the X button will line up some potential headshots to boost your score even further.

After each kill you have a short amount of time to find another victim to keep your action combination alive by unlocking extra health, rewinds and 'Loco' moves depending on how well you do. Rewinds can be used to bring you back to life by taking the action back ten seconds or so (with extra health to avoid impossible recoveries). Loco moves are your specials and a few of them are, well, pretty special. Having played the game for some time, our favourite has to be the 'Hurricane' which throws you into a slow-motion, airborne, 360-degree spin, destroying everything in range, be it a local, explosives or an innocent chicken.

Subtlety does not apply. The action is relentless and the Mexican theme has a tequila-laced tongue so far in its cheek that it can lick its own ears. The obvious downside is that *Total Overdose* runs the risk of being a one-trick pony. Like *The Punisher*, is it simply a forced arsenal of cool kills that can't deliver a natural high? Maybe, but then who said we had to take all games seriously?

Look, it's not exactly *Ico*, but sometimes it's fun to shoot well-endowed, bikini-clad ladies.

"IT'S LIKE A BEAT-'EM-UP WITH GUNS, WITH THE SPECIAL MOVES INVOLVING A SHOTGUN TO THE FACE"


eMag

MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE



"WHAT IF GRAFFITI COULD CHANGE THE WORLD?"
MARC ECKO

■ Trane is a suitably 'street' kinda guy – the voice of Talib Kweli is only going to help this.

■ As usual, the law will be out in force to ruin your fun. Stick it to the man.

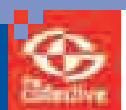
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PAINTING THE TOWN RED

JET SET RADIO + REAL WORLD + THE LAW = MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CUP

MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

PLAYSTATION2

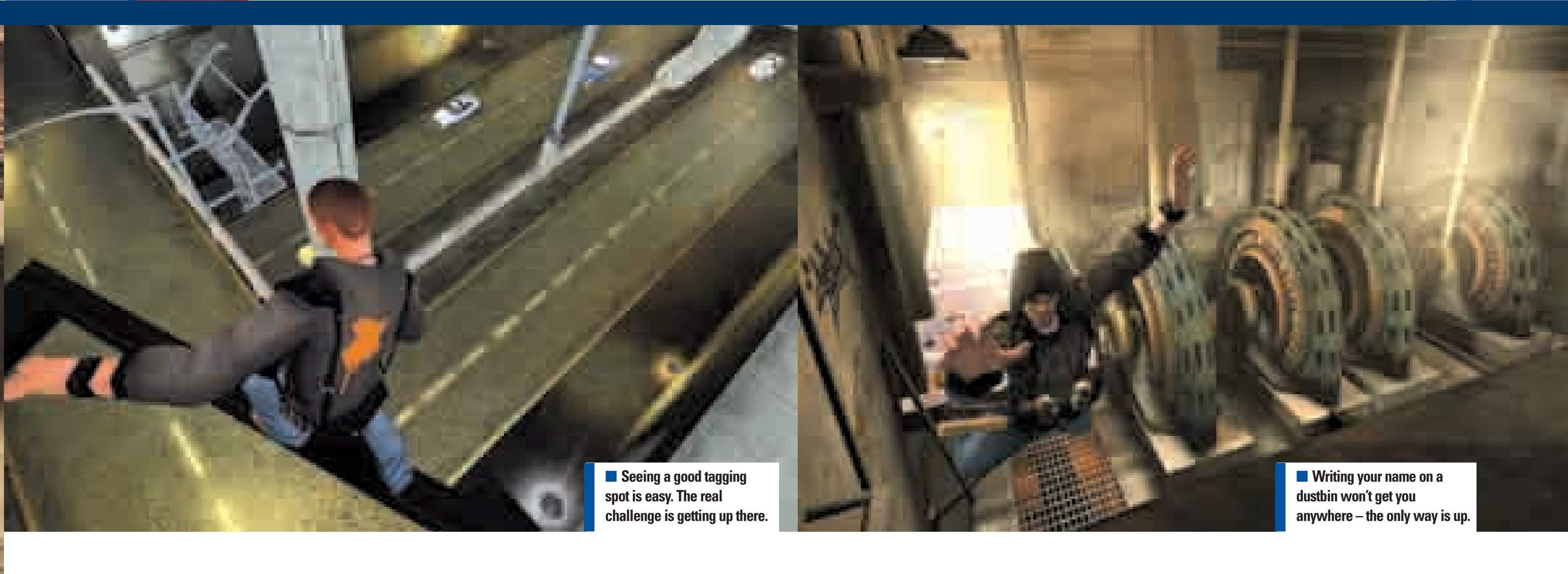


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Based in California, The Collective has been making games since 1997, beginning with conversions of *Men In Black* and *Game Of Life* for the PSone. It now looks like the studio will merge with Backbone Entertainment to create a new company called Foundation 9.

HISTORY

■ **WRATH UNLEASHED** 2004 [Multi]
■ **INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB** 2003 [Multi]
■ **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER** 2001 [Multi]



■ Seeing a good tagging spot is easy. The real challenge is getting up there.

■ Writing your name on a dustbin won't get you anywhere – the only way is up.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: The Collective
RELEASE: June '05
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Avoid the law and earn respect by getting around the city and tagging some of the most out-of-reach places you can think of.

IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS

Here in the UK we really miss out when it comes to graffiti. If you go to London you might see the occasional piece that's actually worth looking at, but you really have to get over to the US if you want to see the good stuff in it's natural environment. A peek on the net is always an option, but then you miss out on what we're told is one the most important aspects of graffiti: the Heaven Spots. Heaven Spots are so called because they're so high or so dangerous that there's a good chance you'll end up in Heaven if you try to tag there – it's all about respect; what your tag looks like pales in comparison to the risks taken to get it there.

Although some other games have touched on graffiti – usually as a way of marking areas you've visited or customising some otherwise bland part of the landscape – *Contents Under Pressure*, brainchild of "fashion pioneer" Marc Ecko, looks more at graffiti culture. It's not about tagging as many places as you can before a time limit runs out or racing rivals to cover a particular spot in paint. There's no opportunity to create your own tag, and – we have on good authority – you do not "fly around on rhinos and win free sweatshirts". This is a game about life as a graffiti artist – a life that we don't actually know that much about, but with a bit of help from Ecko, we've started to learn.

Set in a time when the government has decided to stub out graffiti for good, you take your character, Trane (who'll be voiced by hip-hop artist Talib Kweli) around the city to see if he can raise his graffiti game from a Toy (a beginner in the graffiti business) to an all-out Legend – a process that will involve you leading him through increasingly difficult situations involving the aforementioned Heaven Spots and – if you're not careful – plenty of police conflict.

Although fighting your way through the game is likely to be a real possibility, and a reasonable amount of urban combat is to be included, something that has been worked on very hard is the stealth element. Graffiti artists aren't traditionally violent types who kill everyone in an area before they start painting their name on a wall. That would just be silly. So The Collective has made sure that this was also the case in *Contents Under Pressure*.

"YOUR MOST POWERFUL WEAPON IS A FLAMETHROWER MADE FROM A CAN OF SPRAY PAINT AND A LIGHTER"

Weapons will generally take the form of whatever is lying around and the most powerful weapon you'll receive will be a rudimentary flamethrower made up from your can of spray paint and a lighter.

Each graffiti opportunity has various entrance points, its own unique dangers and plenty of escape routes that will ultimately determine how successfully your attempt to tag is executed. It looks like this may well be a case of spending a large amount of time sussing out situations before diving in and it is currently showing a surprising amount of depth for a game that is essentially just about graffiti.

As Mr Ecko himself told us, "after playing *Contents Under Pressure* you'll start looking at graffiti in a whole new way. You'll find yourself wondering how they managed it rather than why." Probably not strictly true, as to create the graffiti we're used to seeing the supposed artist has had to do little more then track down a permanent marker and raise his hand to eye level – but we know what Ecko's getting at.

TAG PARTY

Contents Under Pressure won't all be about finding the most dangerous place you can stick your name. We've been told that hidden throughout the game will be various tags that belong to real-life graffiti legends who wanted to get involved with the title. As a graffiti artist would have in real life, you'll be armed with a Black Book that you can fill with these legendary tags as you track them down. Sounds simple, but artists who have acquired this legendary status are unlikely to have stuck their tags on the side of a bus stop. We predict that you'll be scaling all manner of ludicrously high things – and probably falling a lot.



"CAUSING A JAW-DROPPING AMOUNT OF DESTRUCTION AND RIPPING EACH OTHER APART WITH VARIOUS WAR MACHINES HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A WAY OF LIFE FOR THE RELIC TEAM"

THE XBOX 360 TITLE THAT'S DRESSED TO KILL

THE OUTFIT

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Relic
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

■ Choose your side and then carve up the other in what could be the most action-packed version of World War II since the real thing.

HISTORY

■ There are many WWII games but this could be something different. It seems apt that *The Outfit* should be a launch title for a brand new console.

Now, we're not travel agents, but we're sure that a trip to Canada is what everyone needs. Friendly bars containing even friendlier people wait for eager journalists like us to wander in just so they can ply you with chicken wings and pitchers of strange brew. It's a very welcoming and pleasant place. Ironic perhaps, that our hosts for the visit had just spent an awful lot of time reliving the not-so-friendly event we know as World War II. In fact, causing a jaw-dropping amount of destruction and ripping each other apart with various war machines has become a way of life for the Vancouver-based team at Relic. The reason? When Xbox 360 arrives, so will *The Outfit*.

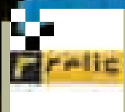
"In a one-sentence summary, it's a third-person, squad-based strategy game," explains Jeff Brown, lead designer on the project. "It incorporates quick tactical strategy with a really fast-paced action game. It's a bit like a third-person *Halo* in terms of pacing, weapon use and vehicle use. What we really tried to do is channel Jerry Bruckheimer into the game."

Adding Jerry Bruckheimer to a videogame? The man who produced such cinema greats as *Kangaroo Jack* and the legwarmer-fest that is *Flashdance*? Say it ain't so… Okay, we're being facetious. Bruckheimer is far better known for his high-octane action movies such as *The Rock* and *Pearl Harbor*, but we still feel this needs to be explained further.

"This isn't a re-creation of *Saving Private Ryan*. What we wanted to achieve was what *Saving Private Ryan* would be like if Jerry Bruckheimer produced it," Brown explains. "Imagine it was more like *Armageddon*, was in your face and really over the top with all the Hollywood action. We're going after a high-entertainment experience. We're not paying homage to how many bolts are in the front of a Panzer or the specific weight of a Panther tank – that doesn't matter to us. These aren't real heroes, we're more of a fictional game."

This comment confirms what we were already fairly sure of – this isn't going to be a regular war game. If we were to attempt to count the number of WWII RTS titles we've seen over the last year we would easily run out of things to count them on. As fine as it is to have a game that contains hard-hitting realism, it's occasionally nice to have some fun thrown into the mix as well. Fun and action is what *The Outfit* is looking to be all about and Relic has spent a long time looking at the genres associated with WWII to create the perfect hybrid.

"We spent the best part of a month sitting in coffee shops talking about what was at the core of strategy games," Brown recalls. "Take a resource system, for

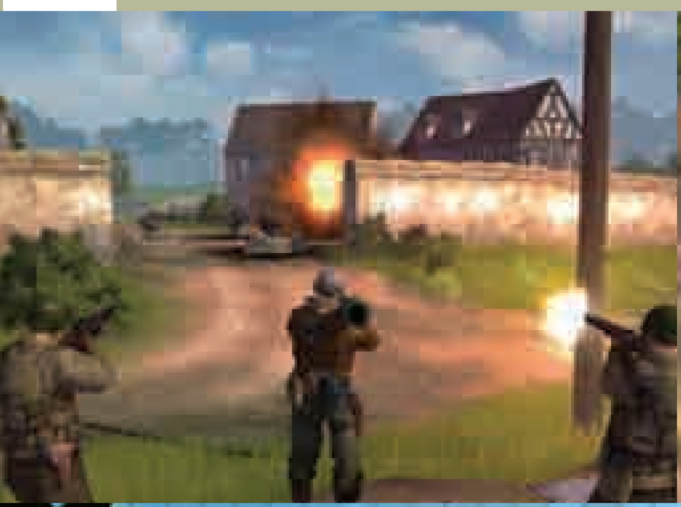


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1997 by Alex Garden and Luke Moloney in Vancouver, Relic set new standards for real-time strategy games with its debut, *Homeworld*. In 2004 Relic joined the THQ family of external studios, allowing the team to begin development of next-generation content.

HISTORY

■ **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR** 2004 [PC]
■ **HOMEWORLD 2** 2003 [PC]
■ **IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES** 2003 [PC]





■ Environments will be destructible – since when can't a wall get blown up?

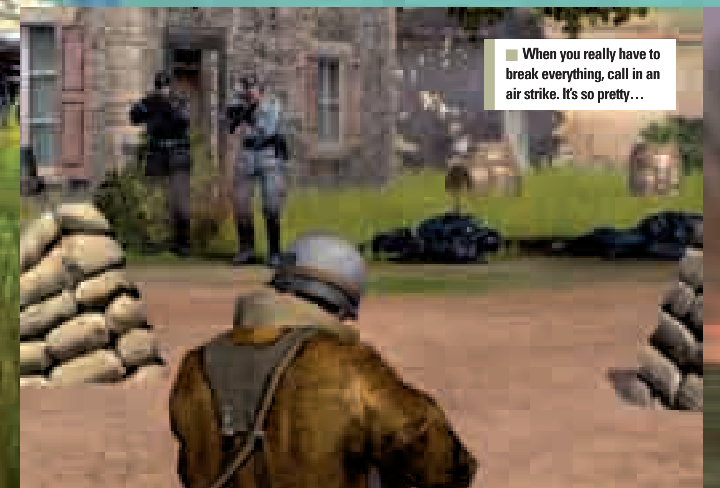
example. There have been games that have called themselves RTSs but haven't included any kind of resource collection. What we found was that these titles just haven't been received that well by the paying public. Why? Well, involving resources enforces an interesting choice. It's not just a case of A or B; it's about what you want to do and how you want to spend. If you have everything from the start then there's no choice; if you have a limited amount of resources things become more interesting – it's that simple."

This may sound strange, but on seeing *The Outfit* in action we can assure you it looks to work even better than the team themselves probably hoped. Rather than sending out harvesting vehicles or ordering villagers to toil in a field for the duration of the game, you can earn credits simply by killing enemies. The more you kill, the more cash you have to play around with, and how you opt to spend this cash (when combined with your skills, obviously) will often dictate who comes out of a battle grinning and who doesn't come out at all.

"What we've done is to have the player choosing between equally attractive options," Brown continues. "We feel that this is the best way to create a game. The core of strategy to us isn't harvesting, it's the ability to change your mind on the fly. You can't do that in *Halo* – you can't just buy a Warthog if

LIVE THE DREAM

As with most war titles, the online experience is planned to be something that will put others in the genre to shame. Although no specific modes have been revealed we could probably all have a fair guess at what it will involve. What will certainly be new is the grading system. "There will be events inside the single-player game that you can stumble upon and choose to take part in should you want to earn a medal, and this will play right into our online strategy," Jeff Brown explains. "It'll be a little like what happened in *Project Gotham* where people can see what you've achieved and what medals you've earned. This is really going to help build the online experience and let players make the game their own."



■ When you really have to break everything, call in an air strike. It's so pretty…



IT'S ALL IN THE MIX

Relic has really done its homework with its latest title and *The Outfit* will feature some of the greatest elements from various genres – not just the one it's competing in. This should ensure that the game not only plays extremely well but should also provide some of the greatest multiplayer battles we've seen so far on any system. You'll soon see what we're talking about…

MAKING TRACKS

■ We all know tanks shouldn't be messed with, but many action/RTS titles don't understand this; in some games, one man can eventually chip away enough energy to destroy a tank. This is something Relic has changed. "We wanted the tanks to be like dragons in fantasy games," says Jeff Brown. "You have to be scared of them. If you put 100 men with handguns against a tank, you're going to lose all your men. When you see a tank floating down from a plane you can't help but think, 'shit, he has tanks'…"

SKILLING TIME

■ Fed up with the same old stock characters with the same old abilities? *The Outfit*'s characters will work in a similar way to those in an RTS, with certain abilities attributed to set characters. "We've really pushed our characters," Brown explains. "You can almost relate to them in the same way as you can those in an RTS game. You have the heroes that lead your squad and they each have their own slate of abilities. Depending on which character you choose greatly shapes how you play – it's really up to you. In multiplayer games you can really mix it up and make sure that your teams work well together."

MEAN MACHINE

■ It's not only the latest racing games that have all the customisation options – *The Outfit* will allow you kit out your tanks with a whole range of intimidating transfers. Although this selection will be limited at first, plenty more will become available as downloadable content – who knows, even a designing your own may become a possibility.



Things look pretty realistic in *The Outfit* but it's all about fun rather than simulation.

you're stuck. What we've done here is ensure that you have the option to change your play style to fit exactly what's going on."

One of the key options that will feature is the ability to purchase vehicles whenever you need them and have them dropped to your current location – an idea that's fully capable of turning a conflict on its head very quickly, and another that's obviously been included to keep the action flowing. "We have over 20 vehicles in our game," says Brown. "Everything from Rolls Royce staff cars and pick-up trucks through to Jeeps and halftracks – even a wheelbarrow should make it in. Players are going to love pushing another soldier around in a wheelbarrow then heading into battle in one." There's no doubting the last point – we can almost smell the 'Wheelbarrow Only' online mode…

"These are proper vehicles," Brown goes on. "Not simple *Battlefield*-style vehicles. There's a full physics rig and independent suspension system for each; you can do *Starsky & Hutch*-style jumps and we've got emergency brakes so you can skid round corners – really cool stuff."

After viewing *The Outfit* for a good few hours, we thought we'd seen everything. We hadn't. As a supply train made its way across a bridge a well-timed air strike obliterated the train and everything around it accompanied by one of the most impressive explosions we had ever seen.

"We've really taken destruction to a new level in this game," Brown says proudly. "It started off as a minor feature, as if we felt we should make everything destructible as a neat feature to welcome in the new console, but it went much further that that. Once we found how far we could go with the new technology we couldn't stop. You really can blow up everything. It's not just a progressive damage system, it's a real damage system. Anything you want to destroy can be destroyed. Set it on fire, blow it up, crush it, run it over… whatever. What we found is that this really changes the nature of the battlefield. The fact that you can blow up a wall that another player is taking cover behind really changes things. When you first see a tank busting through your hiding place you find yourself thinking 'holy crap, that's not right'. But it is. That's life. A tank can take out a wall, easy."

With the current frenzy for war-based titles and the way that most lend themselves so well to online play, we're guessing that *The Outfit* will be a key title when Xbox 360 makes it into our living rooms. Attention, men…

"OUR STORY IS LIKE SAVING PRIVATE RYAN MEETS THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER"

JEFF BROWN, LEAD DESIGNER, RELIC

TALK THIS WAY

If there's one thing that proves how big the games industry is becoming, it's the fact that major Hollywood stars are getting involved with titles. *The Outfit* is boasting one of the most impressive line-ups yet… "We have quite a bit of Hollywood talent behind this title," Jeff Brown tells us. "We have the Hellboy Ron Perlman, as well as Robert Patrick the evil Terminator." Alongside these established names are a host of up and coming actors, and even though such talent comes at a price, Brown is convinced it's money well spent. "These voices were worth every damn penny. I've only just heard the results but they really do work so well."



SOLDIER PROFILE

■ Soldiers. They're obvious choices for videogame characters – a group of people who are already associated with weaponry and machines of destruction and have had their place in almost every era you can think of. Despite them being perfect fodder for games, it's amazing the number of titles that mess the idea up.

HISTORY

- ■ CONFLICT: VIETNAM 2004 [Multi]
- ■ BATTLEFIELD 2002 [PC]
- ■ CANNON FODDER 1994 [Multi]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

WWII RTS - TIME + ARCADE = THE OUTFIT

"HISTORICALLY, IN WAR AT LEAST, WE FEEL THAT THE SIDE WITH THE BEST UNIFORM ALWAYS LOSES"

JEFF BROWN, LEAD DESIGNER, RELIC

■ Grab yourself the right weapons and spectacular explosions can be yours…

■ This is the enemy. Though we'd kind of hope you knew that already…

24: THE GAME



DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Cambridge Studio
RELEASE: Autumn '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Fox's high-rating real-time television series is brought to the PS2, with the entire cast in tow, wishing they'd read their contracts better so they might not have to fool around wearing ping-pong ball-covered outfits.

A BAD DAY FOR JACK BAUER, OR FOR PS2 GAMERS?

It's unsurprising that the phrase 'real-time' isn't once mentioned in the press release for *24: The Game*. We can't begin to fathom how you'd implement such a contrived gaming conceit, and apparently neither can Sony. Rather, from early promotional gubbins, *24* looks like *The Getaway* with puzzle elements (in place of the gratuitous swearing, no doubt), though it would be a very bad day for Sony if Fox's property translates as poorly as *Black Monday*'s feeble script.

Mixing on-foot action with driving – which, as in the show, will probably enable gamers to hightail it across Los Angeles in the space of an ad break – Sony's game looks to forefront the action elements of Jack Bauer's implausible counter-terrorism escapades rather than the logistic impossibilities of a time-specific plot scenario.

However, Sony does promise that the game, set between seasons two and three of the show, will offer some insight into the unspoken events occurring between the series, which have until now been attributed solely to bad scriptwriting. What happened following President Palmer's poison-handed assassination attempt? How does Chase end up partnered with an obviously troubled psychotic? How does Kim Bauer qualify for a job at CTU?

Frankly, we're more interested to see if this will turn out to be yet another instalment of the underwhelming *Primal*, but are prepared to hold out hope that the final game won't hark back to the days of the fast-buck Ocean tie-in.

As a plus point, these early screenshots suggest the game will retain the stylistic trappings of the show, including multi-screened action à la Quantic Dream's promising *Fahrenheit*. That said, we've never quite understood what all the fuss was about; VW campers have been using split-screen technology since the Sixties, and nobody really coos about those any more.

Some CTU-related computer hacking elements and intense interrogation sequences should add a bit of much-needed variety to the 100 missions on offer, but we're betting *24* – with its star-studded, motion-captured cast and high-concept, explosive action sequences, much like recent franchise games as *CSI* – will be best appreciated by the choir already singing its praises. If only this had arrived before viewer interest had reached its peak, Sony might have had a juggernaut hit on its hands.

"EARLY SCREENSHOTS SUGGEST THE GAME WILL RETAIN THE STYLISTIC TRAPPINGS OF THE SHOW"



You'll get to drive a car, much like Jack in the TV series. Ground-breaking.

The best way to quash terrorism is to blow things up. Frequently.


eMag

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3

IT'S 'THIRD TIMELINE'S THE CHARM' FOR UBI'S PREMIER ADVENTURER

PS2 **In an age when many sequels merely include a few frivolous additions, Ubisoft's post-Jordan Mechner *Prince Of Persia* titles have each taken a running jump away from what made the previous game in the series so successful.** For *Warrior Within*, the developer chose to forefront the freeform fighting aspect of the engine after executive producer Yannis Mallat called the combat in *Sands Of Time* "boring". Much of the acrobatic grandeur of the first outing was replaced with a contrived narrative and some frustratingly epic boss battles.

Now the series looks set to make a similarly flamboyant leap for its third instalment, introducing a dual-character system and moving much of its action from the high-walled interiors of the last two games to the equally high-walled streets and rooftops of Babylon.

For those not keeping up with the plot – even those who played *Warrior Within* to its final time-repeat boss battle – the Prince has now 'fixed' events so the Sands of Time were never created, enabling him to return to his beloved Babylon and reign peacefully over his people. However, his actions have left a rift in time, causing the Prince to coexist in two forms in the same dimension. "Aren't you worried about these paradoxes getting in the way of a good story?" we asked Mallat. "Yes," he replied with a smile, "to a certain extent. We care just enough so that it's still coherent. But if you scratch your head for a while you'll find a flaw."

> "IT'S A BROADER APPROACH, BUT ALSO A STEP TOWARDS REFINING PREVIOUS EFFORTS INTO MORE OF A CONSISTENT CHALLENGE"

The 'other' version of the Prince is a white-haired, darker incarnation; the man who would have existed had our hero never embarked upon his first two adventures. A more stealthy, clandestine figure than the standard, beardy whinger, he comes with a move set to parallel his shadowy aesthetic, including a one-hit stealth kill. He also comes equipped with some vicious chain-blades, enabling the freeform fighting to be approached from a greater distance than in previous instalments.

It's a broader approach, but also a step towards refining previous efforts into more of a consistent challenge: for example, both Princes have new acrobatic abilities that allow them to move away from the constraints of four-direction wall jumping. After all, it's been two years since *Sands Of Time*, and titles such as *God Of War* have seriously upped the ante for action-adventure titles in the meantime.

Mallat promises that *Prince Of Persia 3* will be the last episode in the Sands of Time 'trilogy', though admits the project was never conceived as such. "When we started *Sands Of Time* it was just about how to revitalise the licence. It soon became obvious that we could progress to a sequel… but we didn't want to do just a sequel… [the trilogy] came very soon."

However, the trilogy's close is unlikely to signal the end of the Prince's adventures; next-gen technology can only extend the possibilities of such a well-considered game world. "It doesn't matter what generation it is," says Mallat, "or how much memory you have to work with. It's more than a tribute to the games that started out." With this ethos guiding the *Prince Of Persia* team, it seems the only boundary confining the series is imagination.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

The Prince of platforming returns for a third stab at consoles, this time in dual personae due to a wholly illogical time paradox.

BABYLON BURNING

Moving the action from the not-so-stuffy interiors of *Sands Of Time* and *Warrior Within* isn't as great a leap from the tried-and-tested template as you might imagine, as it looks like the route through each level is still satisfyingly logic-puzzle linear. Rather, the innovations seem to be in the two Princes' new environment-specific moves. For example, our hero can split jump between two walls like Sam Fisher, using the tension to slide down, sending a *Matrix*-y flurry of smashed tiles onto the floor below. Additionally, the grandiose exteriors of Babylon are unlikely to disappoint – even compared to the previous games' more overwhelming environments such as the clock tower or Menagerie – as *Prince Of Persia 3* includes some formidable architecture.



The new Dark Prince (right) is far removed from the classic *Prince Of Persia* look (left).



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Ubisoft Montreal has gone from strength to strength in recent years, with the *Prince Of Persia* 'trilogy' merely the tip of a very broad gaming iceberg. The Montreal team is also responsible for such gaming highlights as *Splinter Cell, Myst IV* and *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*.

HISTORY

- **PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN** 2004 [Multi]
- **MYST IV** 2003 [PC]
- **SPLINTER CELL** 2002 [Xbox]

You can now leap from walls, killing enemies with a single swipe of your blade.

"THE PRINCE IS GOING TO MEET THE MAN HE WOULD BE WITHOUT THE SANDS OF TIME"
YANNIS MALLAT, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

YOU ARE NOT YOU – YOU'RE ME

SANDS OF TIME ÷ TWINS x OUTDOORS = PRINCE OF PERSIA 3

Brace-sliding between two walls is a neat touch, and will enable some crafty, Sinbad-esque shoulder-landing antics.

ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA



■ Beating on identical quintuplets is a hobby of Klein's. Perhaps.

■ No RPG worth its salt can be without flashy magic effects and, even in 2D, *Eternal Mana* provides.

"WE CAN DEFINITELY SAY THAT AS THE SIXTH INSTALMENT OF THE ATELIER SERIES, ETERNAL MANA IS THE MOST INNOVATIVE TITLE"
NISAMERICA.COM

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NIPPON ICHI PLAYS MIX AND MATCH

DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS + UNLIMITED SAGA + ALUNDRA = ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA



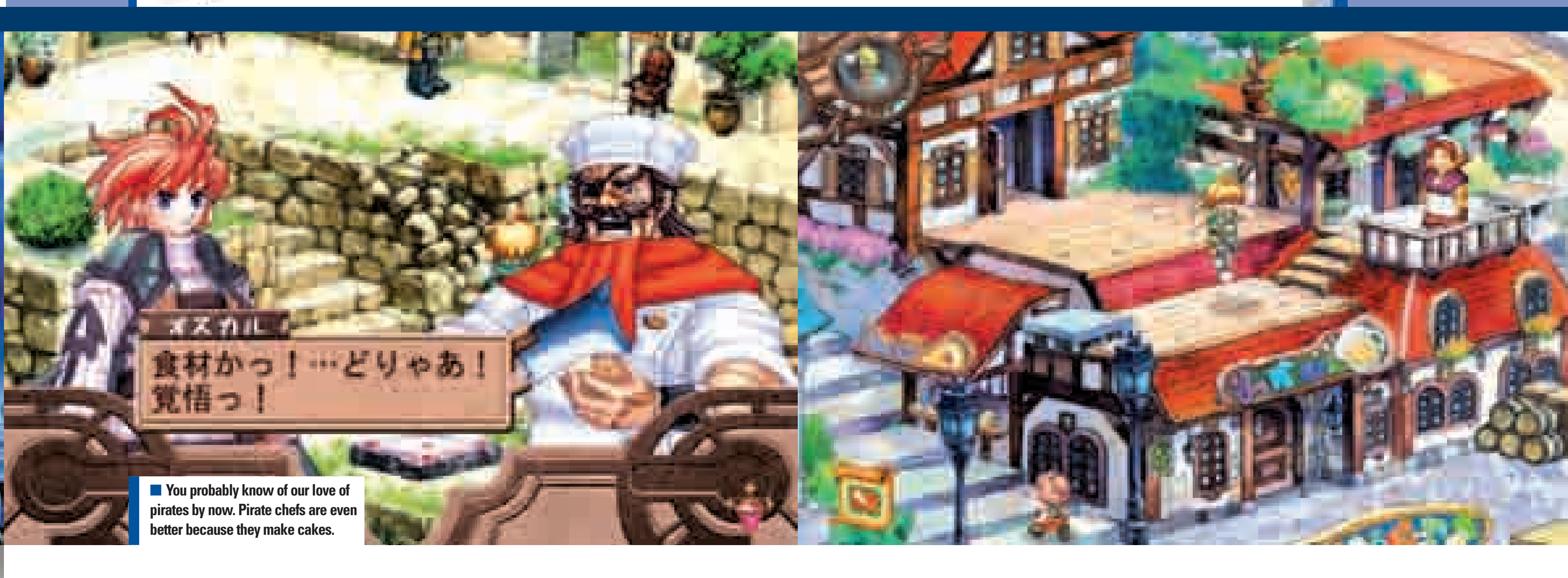
DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ In case you hadn't already gathered, we love Nippon Ichi. It may have destroyed hours of our lives but the barrage of absolutely stunning titles we've enjoyed from the Japanese firm means we can never stay mad at it for long. Prinny dood!

HISTORY

- **PHANTOM BRAVE** 2005 [PS2]
- **DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS** 2004 [PS2]
- **RHAPSODY: A MUSICAL ADVENTURE** 2000 [PSone]





■ You probably know of our love of pirates by now. Pirate chefs are even better because they make cakes.

HI-RES HI-JINX FROM THE PRINNY BRIGADE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: TBC
DEVELOPER: Nippon Ichi/Gust
RELEASE: TBC (US: May '05)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ *Phantom Brave* proved that Nippon Ichi didn't need grids to make great games, but now even the strategy elements have been cast aside as the Japanese developer moves into traditional RPGs.

PS2 **It can be all too easy for a developer to fall into a loop; BioWare, for instance, is never likely to start work on a racing title.** So while the number-crunching of *Disgaea*, *La Pucelle* and *Phantom Brave* might have heralded accusations of Nippon Ichi being a one-trick pony, its next title will see it take a step (albeit not a massive one) away from the genre for which it is so well known.

Having proved its worth in the strategy RPG department, Nippon Ichi is trying its hand at a fully fledged role-playing game. Set in the world of Regallzine (which, unless our geography is even worse than we feared, is a fictional setting), *Atelier Iris* lays down a world based in magic, Mana and mystery. Hero Klein is one of many people who can harness the power of the Mana in practising alchemy, giving him the ability to create… well, things. Lots of things.

The key feature while not in battle will be Synthesis, the ability to co-operate with Mana in such a way that will be beneficial to your cause. This can take several forms, and whether you're mixing up weapons or items to improve them (or come up with something fantastic and new) or using the power of Mana to progress into otherwise unreachable areas, this is one element you can't afford to be without. But while most RPGs sport some kind of item mixing/creation system, it's the latter use of Mana that sounds particularly appealing.

Reminding us of *Story Of Thor* on the Mega Drive, you'll need the help of various elementals to make anything resembling progress. Diemia, Mana of Rock, is the only assistant whose purpose has been made clear so far (Klein can use him as a stepping stone when summoned) but after a brief think back to the Sega adventure, it's pretty much safe to assume there'll be plenty of setting and putting out fires as well as some more inventive uses for the less obvious Elementals.

But of course these Elemental allies will prove just as useful in battle as they do in town or in the field. Even while in their most basic form Mana will be reliable companions, but with their ability to morph into different forms (Elemental properties and statistics are liable to change along with appearance) they become more useful still. The battle system itself seems fairly interesting – each attack has its own type and speed, meaning slow but powerful magical attacks can be interrupted with quicker strikes.

After looking at the screenshots it really is a foregone conclusion that Nippon Ichi has completely outdone itself. Even those who proudly wear '2D is dead' T-shirts couldn't deny the beauty of these stills, but without seeing it in motion we can't say for sure whether the animation will do the game justice. Based on the PS2's frankly nasty RAM and several past hi-res efforts we can but fear the worst. Still, if there's one company we'd be willing to back in doing it right, this is definitely the one.

Suffice to say that hopes are high for *Atelier Iris*. Nippon Ichi has pretty much done no wrong this generation and as Microsoft hurriedly ushers in a new wave of more powerful technology it's great to see developers who don't blindly strive for photo-realism. We know better than to expect such silliness fromNippon Ichi but we still can't wait to try our hands at alchemy when the game launches in the States this month.

"SLOW BUT POWERFUL MAGICAL ATTACKS CAN BE INTERRUPTED WITH QUICKER STRIKES"

SYNTHESIZE ME

We've mentioned Item Synthesis briefly but when there's so much to it, it would be rude not to go into a little more depth. A lot will depend on which Mana you get to assist you in item creation – a fire Mana will be great at creating bombs while a Mana of water will be quite rubbish, yet pretty useful for making healing items. On top of this, each Mana has its own personality and may not be willing to help you at first (or perhaps at all) but there'll be plenty of Mana to track down for the eager explorer, much like the Djinn of *Golden Sun*. This process will also allow existing equipment to be improved beyond all recognition – useful for those who don't like spending all their time and money in the game's shop.

FULL AUTO



You know you're in trouble when a fleet of heavily armed cars end up on your tail…



Destructible environments mean you can blast your way through most things.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Pseudo Interactive
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Racing Action
PLAYERS: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)

CONCEPT

Mad Max in bling-covered cars? It'll work if Sega has its way with this high-octane next-generation racing blaster…

GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ROCKET LAUNCHERS

Those of you with decent memories (or a copy of issue 18 of games™ to hand) might recall a technical demo called *Crash* from last year's Game Developers' Conference. Take one super high-resolution purple Ferrari, send it flying off a ramp at high speed and then watch it smash to pieces in a completely realistic fashion. As the highlight of Microsoft's XNA software announcement, it certainly impressed enough people. Of course, it was only a matter of time before rumours started circulating that the demo was actually an early physics demo for a genuine Xbox 360 launch title… and for once, the rumourmongers got it completely right.

And so we have *Full Auto*, a game that Sega has already claimed has "the most destructive racing action ever". Too bold a boast? That depends on how you term 'destructive racing action'. Although the *Crash* demo has already given us a taste of what kind of car-based collision damage we can expect, the actual gameplay suggests that *Full Auto* is taking the route previously driven by *Carmageddon*, instead of following *Burnout 3*'s flaming tyre tracks, with a touch of *Need For Speed Underground*'s customisation thrown in just for the hell of it.

As such, we have suitably pimped rides with all the spoilers, polish and rims you could possibly want, which are then tooled up further with whatever weaponry you deem appropriate – machine guns, cannons and rocket launchers make up just some of the ten different weapon types, although you can mix and match to your own taste. Add ten individual play modes (including a 60-event Career mode and others under the headings of Pursuit, Tag, Arena and Rampage) and you've got a game that sounds more *Twisted Metal* than, well, *Twisted Metal*.

Of course, there has to be a trick to it and *Full Auto* introduces the concept of 'Unwreck' – the ability to rewind short periods of time à la Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia* thereby avoiding obstacles that made you crash, taking short cuts you missed and generally correcting any mistakes you make. Yes, it made us cringe too. Clearly, time control is the new stealth/cel-shading/ragdoll physics and while it may very well work in *Full Auto*'s favour, we already have our world-weary reservations.

That said, the game obviously needs something to make it stand out from the other racing action titles on the market besides looking oh-so-pretty; no doubt we'll know whether *Full Auto* succeeds after going hands-on at E3.



See what happens when you get carried away with your weapon fetish? It's a worry…

"THE THOUGHT OF REWINDING TIME À LA PRINCE OF PERSIA SOUNDS A LITTLE GIMMICKY"


eMag

CRASHDAY



It looks nice now, but wait until we've strapped a few guns on the front. Oh, wait. That would be lame.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Moon Byte Studios
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

It's not just about crossing the line first this time; you'll have to master various other modes to be number one in this game.

COULD IT BE THE DAY WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR?

Ever since *Burnout 3* came blistering into our lives we've been waiting for something to better it. There are a few racing titles that have come close, but we still find ourselves returning frequently to annihilate lesser players and grab a few more Takedowns for our stats sheet. We know some developer somewhere will manage it someday, though, and it looks as if *Crashday* could stand as good a chance as any. Rather than force you to take part in nothing but street races and mundane lap-based events, *Crashday* will be providing you with vehicles that are essentially your playthings. Sure, all the regular racing action you'd expect to find will be in there somewhere, but the amount of options and modes that are expected to appear could well make this one of the most varied racing titles to appear on this generation of console.

One of the most interesting of these is the Stunt mode. This mode will require you to forget about the more tedious aspects of racing such as out-braking opponents and the dreaded racing lines and instead makes you burn around a city performing as many score-boosting stunts as you can. The more impressive the feat, the more points you'll receive. Think *Tony Hawk's Underground* with cars and you won't go far wrong.

Also planned is *Crashday*'s very own version of *Burnout 3*'s Crash mode. As it's called Wrecking mode you'd be forgiven for thinking that this could well be just an attempt to steal an idea that aided the success of arguably the greatest racing game ever, but *Crashday* will be adding a few tricks of its own to ensure the experience is fresh. Among these will be an option that's bound to receive mixed reactions from gamers – the ability to arm your vehicles with weapons. Rightfully provided as an option that can be toggled on or off, this seems likely to play a large part in multiplayer games for those who tire of regular racing and fancy livening things up a bit.

At present *Crashday* is looking very promising and with a release not due until the end of the year there's still plenty of time to make it even better. We'll be keeping our fingers crossed, however, that Moon Byte comes up with something that builds on *Burnout 3*'s success and ingenuity, rather than some rusty also-ran.

> "STUNT MODE REQUIRES YOU TO FORGET ABOUT THE MORE TEDIOUS ASPECTS OF RACING, MAKING YOU PERFORM TRICKS"



That's a lovely set of wheels there. Why not wreck it? For a laugh, like?

It even seems that vehicle customisation could be an option. Take that, *NFSU*.


eMag

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR 2: TEN HAMMERS

THE GAME FINALLY LIVES UP TO ITS NAME

If ever there were an example of videogame futility, it lies here. Imagine you're one of the development team currently working on ultra-realistic shooter *America's Army*. You know that *Full Spectrum Warrior 2* is also in development. Finding the will to go into work each morning must be hard. It's amazing to think that the *FSW* franchise is based on that original army simulation idea that's has gone on to cause all kinds of arguments with the military, which is apparently not happy that its game is less polished than the PC retail release. Oh well, Pandemic doesn't need to worry about such politics. Which is good for you, because it means you get a game that provides simulated warfare as well as fun.

Full Spectrum Warrior dropped you into gritty street-based battles and that was pretty much it. It was enjoyable, but this was primarily for the mentally nourishing challenge rather than out-and-out fun gameplay – at its heart it was a squad simulation. In *Full Spectrum Warrior 2* the combat remains the same but the rest of the game has been given that all-important Hollywood feel, something that is instantly noticeable from the game opening and the mission structure. The developer freely admits that it's trying to create a *Pulp Fiction*-style playing experience with the storytelling. The entire game focuses around a few key events and you play through those events from four different perspectives using four different squads, all of which have the mutual objective of destroying a strategically important bridge.

If this sounds like a lazy excuse to reuse game areas, it isn't. Area repetition is minimal and crossover action is merely hinted at – for example, an explosion on the horizon or hitting a big battle from opposing sides. This approach works very well and gives the game the feel that you're in a full-scale war and you're a part of the bigger picture.

The war itself has been made a lot more complicated for this game as well – there's always something going on and it can be difficult at times to know what to do when arriving at a new area. As well as the various allied forces in play you have two enemy factions to watch out for: the new Anseral-Rahmon and the Mujahideen from the first game. Both want to kill you, but they also hate each other as well. Battles can become very chaotic very fast.

Simply put, there are now many more opportunities for mistakes, especially since you can now find yourself with eight teams to control – that's up to 32 men under your command, all of whom can now also die. Previously, an injured comrade would just lie on the floor and grumble until you scooped up the body and got it to a medic, but now if you don't act quickly there is a possibility they will die. Even if you do manage to collect the body there's still a chance they could die on the way to the medic. You have three replacement soldiers for each of the four chapters but falling back on these should be considered the last resort. A sparkly eyed recruit will be little consolation if you lose an important character like the new sniper class.

So how are you supposed to handle all of this responsibility and fight two forces at the same time? Thankfully, the control system, although similar on the surface, has been massively updated. Every single button press is in here from before, but ▷

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Pandemic
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

The war simulation hit of last year returns and shows up its predecessor before it's even finished being developed.

MORE HUMAN THAN...

The developer has said that for this game it wants to introduce the player to the multiplayer game by using the single-player campaign. This means tuning the AI to give the illusion of human behaviour – a notoriously impossible task. However, the results so far are promising. We're not going to say the AI feels like an opposing human, because it doesn't, but it does provide a much bigger challenge. The randomly placed enemy forces will always move positions to get a better angle, they use flanking/covering moves and they will hunt you down if you leave an area. Given the chance they'll also resort to precision firing and grenade use. At the very least this should increase the replay value.

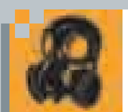
"YOU ARE IN A FULL-SCALE WAR, YOU ARE A PART OF THE BIGGER PICTURE"



Not all of the doors are locked, so you'll now be able to enter some buildings.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR 2: TEN HAMMERS

XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Pandemic has been pumping out quality products from its bases in Los Angeles and Brisbane for six years. *Mercenaries* was one of its recent hits, while the forthcoming *Destroy All Humans!* looks like it will be another smash.

HISTORY

- **MERCENARIES** 2005 [Multi]
- **STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT** 2004 [Multi]
- **FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR** 2004 [Multi]

"BY NOT FOCUSING ON ONE SQUAD WE'RE ABLE TO BOUNCE AROUND IN TIME AND PLACE – MUCH LIKE PULP FICTION"

WILLIAM HENRY STAHL, DIRECTOR, PANDEMIC

■ The massive introductory training level from the first game has thankfully been removed.

■ The environments move away from the (unintentional) Iraqi feel of the previous game.

■ Caution, caution, caution – moving forward is always a precarious concept…

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR 2: TEN HAMMERS [CONT.]



As well as squads you can now, using a similar system, control vehicles.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE WARRIOR RETURNS WITH SOME BIG IDEAS

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR + RAINBOW SIX + PULP FICTION = FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR 2

"FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR PUTS YOU IN THE DIRT WITH YOUR MEN, WHERE DANGER LURKS AROUND EVERY SINGLE CORNER"

PANDEMIC PRESS RELEASE

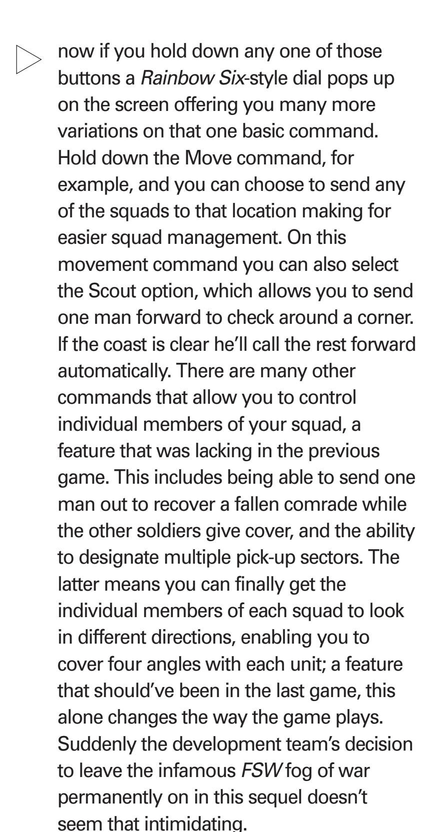


MILITARY PROFILE

Having a member of the Armed Forces (either active or retired) involved in your game is nothing new – EA has been doing it for years with the *Medal Of Honor* series. However, now the entire US Army is getting in on the act; a worrying thought, considering how keen they are on signing up new recruits…

HISTORY

- **SNIPER ELITE** 2005 [Multi]
- **FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR** 2004 [Multi]
- **AMERICA'S ARMY** 2002 [PC]



now if you hold down any one of those buttons a *Rainbow Six*-style dial pops up on the screen offering you many more variations on that one basic command. Hold down the Move command, for example, and you can choose to send any of the squads to that location making for easier squad management. On this movement command you can also select the Scout option, which allows you to send one man forward to check around a corner. If the coast is clear he'll call the rest forward automatically. There are many other commands that allow you to control individual members of your squad, a feature that was lacking in the previous game. This includes being able to send one man out to recover a fallen comrade while the other soldiers give cover, and the ability to designate multiple pick-up sectors. The latter means you can finally get the individual members of each squad to look in different directions, enabling you to cover four angles with each unit; a feature that should've been in the last game, this alone changes the way the game plays. Suddenly the development team's decision to leave the infamous *FSW* fog of war permanently on in this sequel doesn't seem that intimidating.

However, perhaps the most important new command is the Precision Fire move. This is activated in much the same way as Covering Fire, only this time when you set the pick-up sector you're given a much smaller circle – small enough for precise head shots. The camera zooms in and allows you to take your time lining up the circle before ordering the shot. As well as being the development team's way of allowing you to get a hands-on kill, this move gives you the chance to take down targets behind cover.

Regardless of how good *Full Spectrum Warrior* was this one grudge kept coming up – surely my soldier could hit him? Now he can. This is a clever addition that doesn't remove any focus from the tactical play, especially since there are drawbacks; try to use the Precision Fire command during a heavy battle and you risk that soldier dying because they'll ignore everything going on around them to make the shot.

The accuracy of that one precise shot depends on a few variables. Factors like what weapon you're using are obvious, but the game now features an Effectiveness dial for each soldier. This has a big effect on the Precision Fire command as well as your basic Move and Fire orders. The dial isn't visible on the screen, instead being shown through four levels of animation ranging from not being under fire to being fully suppressed. If your unit is at the far end of this scale your accuracy goes way down and they won't be able to throw grenades as far because they're crying for mummy. This ineffective state can be brought on through heavy incoming enemy fire or if one man witnesses his friend's death or accidentally kills a civilian.

We've only scraped the surface of the new features in *Full Spectrum Warrior 2*, but hopefully you can see already how different the gameplay is. This is no boring sequel – it feels like an entirely new playing experience.

"THIS IS NO BORING SEQUEL – IT FEELS LIKE AN ENTIRELY NEW PLAYING EXPERIENCE"

CHOOSING SIDES

When Pandemic finished the first title it had no idea how successful the online co-op play would become – and now you can finally play some versus games. In these mission-based battles you can play on one of two sides: the Allied forces act pretty much the same as in the single-player game; the Insurgents, on the other hand, have different weapons, don't move as a squad, can respawn and only have proximity communication. As well as this you also have the Co-op Story mode, which is the same as before only now you can leave the game open so that people can jump into the bodies of terrorists, the idea being that you won't know if your target is human or AI – and that's easily one of the best features in *Ten Hammers*.



Pandemic is ensuring a step up in the detail level when it comes to *Ten Hammers*.

SOUL CALIBUR III

"THE STORY OF WARRIORS LURED BY THE BIPOLAR SWORDS, SOON TO BE REVEALED..."

Yes, it is exclusive to PlayStation2 and no, it won't be appearing on Xbox or GameCube. That's the official line from Namco confirming that the third instalment in the *Soul Calibur* series will be exclusive to Sony's machine, so at least the rumour-mongers will now be forced to speculate on the reasons behind the decision rather than the decision itself.

With that in mind, it also dismisses the question of whether console-exclusive characters return, with series producer Hiroaki Yotoriyama saying he doesn't like doing the same thing twice. That said, three fresh faces ensure that the obligatory new characters are ticked off the beat-'em-up sequel checklist. Zasalamel is a hooded fighter who wields a giant scythe, while 17-year-old Tira relies on a Ring Blade as her weapon of choice, as used to great effect in the *Dynasty Warriors* series.

The most interesting fighter is Setsuka, who uses a Katana hidden in her umbrella. While the fighting styles of the new characters have yet to be confirmed, given the number of kung fu films where umbrellas have featured as weapons it's not entirely implausible to think Setsuka's style is grounded in pure martial arts. Familiar names such as Heishirou Mitsurugi and Taki will also be back although Sony's refusal to confirm that all the characters will return must have some fans shifting uneasily in their seats.

The mandatory Story mode will take centre stage, again focusing on each character's battle to reach the two swords – holy Soul Calibur and corrupting Soul Edge. Other standard modes include Versus, Practice and Museum. However, there will be interesting variants to support these. Soul Arena offers variations of bouts in special situations, and it wouldn't be surprising to see fights similar to *Soul Calibur II*'s variations with wall damage, invisible assailants and air combos being a few examples. Versus Special Mode is the usual Versus match but with an option to toggle these variations on and off, while Versus Competition Mode offers knock-out tournaments and league competitions, broadening the genre beyond its usual two-player constraints.

But it's the ambiguous presence of World Competition Mode, described as battles against tough virtual contestants, that should whet the appetite. As an online mode for *Soul Calibur III* will be a no-show, World Competition will probably offer something similar to Quest mode in *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution*, with AI replicas of the top international *Soul Calibur* players.

However, the boldest new mode is undoubtedly Lost Chronicle, which is essentially a create-a-fighter mode. You can make your own character, changing looks, gender, occupation and weapon. These created fighters are then used in what's described as a "real-time simulation".

Otherwise, it looks to be business as usual for *Soul Calibur* with the drastic changes aimed at the game's structure rather than the core gameplay. Whether this will recapture the glories of *Soul Calibur* or retain the slight disappointment that accompanied *Soul Calibur II* will depend almost entirely on how well these new modes work. And with a release date yet to be announced, there's plenty of time to make sure they do.

"THE DRASTIC CHANGES SEEM TO HAVE BEEN AIMED AT THE GAME'S STRUCTURE RATHER THAN THE CORE GAMEPLAY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: TBA '05 (Japan: TBA, US: 2005)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

- Weapon-based and excessively flamboyant fighter with dramatic voice-overs returns for its second bout on the PlayStation2.

CANNOT CONNECT TO SERVER

Hiroaki Yotoriyama has all but confirmed that *Soul Calibur III* won't be online due to technical reasons. "Currently, the online infrastructure is extremely different between countries and there are people that can't enjoy network gaming," he said. "We've decided to concentrate on improving the offline game… so that people all over the world will be able to have fun." *Dead Or Alive: Ultimate* and *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* have proved that beat-'em-ups rely on lag-free matches more than any other genre. In light of this, Yotoriyama's decision to focus on the offline game can only be applauded and perhaps should be heeded by fellow beat-'em-up developers until the online infrastructure meets the demands made on it.



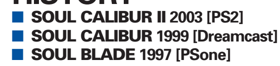
Threatening, frightening and almost certainly evil, Zasalamel has the face (and name) of a man who really wants to hurt you.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

namco

■ *Tekken* arguably represents Namco's current best-known series but the Japanese developer also boasts *Ridge Racer, Time Crisis* and, on show here, *Soul Calibur*. Namco has also recently created a separate handheld division with the sole purpose of developing games for the PSP and DS, as seen with *Ridge Racers* and *Mr Driller: Drill Spirits*.

HISTORY



■ **SOUL CALIBUR II** 2003 [PS2]
■ **SOUL CALIBUR** 1999 [Dreamcast]
■ **SOUL BLADE** 1997 [PSone]

"SOUL CALIBUR III OFFERS THE SERIES' HALLMARKS OF EXHILARATING SWORD-FIGHTING ACTION AND PROFOUND MARTIAL ARTS"
NAMCO PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

UMBRELLAS + AI x THREE = SOUL CALIBUR III

■ Only Taki and Mitsurugi are confirmed to return, which must leave anyone who mastered 'lesser' characters such as Talim worried.

■ Taki now seems to have a more elegant, simple look about her that should make her throat-slitting move look even more deadly.

FARCRY INSTINCTS

BRINGING NEW MEANING TO THE TERM 'PRIMAL RAGE'



You might get the drop on him from a distance but those sniper rifles are pretty noisy…

'It's not a remake, it's an adaptation.' That's the Ubisoft line about its reinvention of the original *FarCry* and, as such, you can expect a mix of familiarity and surprise upon experiencing *FarCry Instincts*. You still play as Jack Carver, stranded on a desert island full of mercenaries all out for your blood, and there's still an evil maniac determined to let… something loose on humanity. However, Ubisoft Montreal (taking the reins after Crytek's work on the PC version) has made enough changes to the more critical elements of the game to turn it into more than just a basic port. Or so it says.

Many of these alterations lie in the new cut-scenes, redesigned levels and even the addition of a revamped multiplayer mode with a full-on *Pariah*-style map creator. However, the concept of Primal Instincts has been added to the gameplay. Becoming available gradually after Jack has a small 'accident' early on in the game, each of the Primal skills enhances your natural talents and carries its own perks, such as the ability to 'sense' the tracks of your adversaries through scent trails or being able to see over long distances.

> "SQUEEZING ALL THE DETAIL OF THE PC VERSION ONTO A CONSOLE IS TESTING UBISOFT"

These skills are critical to your success (particularly as the game has been engineered to ensure that you can't get through some areas without them – the long-distance sight replaces the need for the PC version's binoculars, for instance), although how quickly the whole set of moves become available and what limits are placed on their use is yet to be decided.

From our limited time with *FarCry Instincts*, we have to admit to having mixed impressions – while it's certainly to Ubisoft's credit that it's managed to recreate even half the detail of the PC version's jungle (albeit in low-res), there's no doubt that the Xbox is being pushed fairly hard. The fact there hasn't been any sign of the PS2 version goes some way to confirming rumours that the developer is having problems getting the game to run on the console, so that's rather worrying.

Add to that a distinct lack of weight on the weaponry and it's clear that even with only five months to go until the game's predicted release, Ubisoft still has plenty of work to do if *FarCry Instincts* is to be the game it deserves to be.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
RELEASE: Sept '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)

CONCEPT

Ubisoft's jungle fever continues on consoles with slightly different gameplay.



FarCry is as much about stealth as it is about killing – learn to take people out quietly.



The level design has been modified to try to make things more varied on consoles.


eMag







CONDEMNED

DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON'T

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Monolith Productions
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: First-Person Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Scares-a-plenty from Monolith's first-person sleuth-'em-up, as the FPS developer forgoes its gun fetish for a more visceral means of expression.

HISTORY

Although Monolith is no stranger to FPS games, the *Condemned* team admits that creating a title that's less gun-intensive has been rather refreshing.

Precognition isn't a talent that we'd normally associate with homeless people, at least not the ones we've encountered in the past. As such, the chance meeting we had on the streets of downtown Seattle with one of the city's finest bums didn't seem like anything out of the ordinary. "Come here, come here," he said in a guttural voice, "I'll show you something you ain't never seen." Naturally, we declined and moved on, leaving him to rant on about darkness, wickedness and flipping coins… but we were still left feeling slightly unsettled. Less than 24 hours later, and we're looking at one of the first launch games for Xbox 360 – quite spookily, with graphics the likes of which we've never seen on a home console.

Coincidence? Well, yes, of course it was. Even so, a dramatic title such as *Condemned* deserves a somewhat overly dramatic introduction, such is the game's determination to deliver what its producer calls "an R-rated movie in game form". True, that's nothing particularly new for a developer to claim, especially since everything from *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* to *Doom 3*, *Manhunt* and *Grand Theft Auto* has already done the adult gaming concept to death. But then, if we told you that *Condemned*'s level of atmosphere and tension, not to mention the way you frantically bludgeon the opposition to death with whatever comes to hand, goes far beyond the cheap shock factor that a lot of mature titles employ… well, you might sit up and take notice.

For starters, the fact that the game focuses on a concept not just concentrated around serial killers (a subject we haven't seen tackled well since *Shadow Man* on

> "THERE'S A VERY VISCERAL, IN-YOUR-FACE EXPERIENCE HERE AND IT'S ALL KIND OF BALANCED IN A TWISTED REALISM"
> *DEREK CHATWOOD, LEVEL DESIGNER, MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS*



■ Not surprisingly, *Condemned* is nothing if not horribly atmospheric…

HAND TO FACE

One of the key elements of *Condemned*'s violence is the range of weaponry, and there are certainly plenty of arms to go around. Which ones you can find and then use, though, depends on your current situation…

DEBRIS WEAPONS

The majority of *Condemned*'s weapons fall into this category, simply because they are (for the most part) actual debris – steam pipes that can be ripped off walls, locker doors, boards torn from shelves or desk tops and so on. As your main source of offensive power, such weapons are reasonably fast and pack quite a punch.

ENTRY TOOLS

Slower than Debris weapons, but for a reason – heavy melee items such as shovels, sledgehammers, crowbars and axes can deal out serious damage if used properly. What's more, they have another use to help you progress; hammers break padlocks, axes open doors and so on.

FIREARMS

A rare discovery, usually found when things are about to get tough. Limited ammo means you won't want to waste it all in one burst, so you can also use guns for melee attacks. However, not only are they weaker than Debris weapons in this state, but continual use will break them.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Sega's quest to be seen as a more dynamic and diverse publisher continues with its decision to add *Condemned* to its ever-growing line of titles that are distinctly different to its usual output. This is the second time Sega has worked with Monolith, following *The Matrix Online*.

HISTORY

■ **THE MATRIX ONLINE** 2005 [PC]
■ **CHILDREN OF THE NILE** 2005 [PC]
■ **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005** 2004 [PC]



■ Collecting evidence is vital, although staying alive is slightly more important.

"SCARILY DETAILED AND FEATURING A HUGE AMOUNT OF JITTERY TENSION, CONDEMNED MADE US WISH WE HAD A CUSHION TO HIDE BEHIND"

the N64) but on what drives people to multiple murder is enough to pique our interest on its own. That it places you as the 'good guy' in the form of former FBI agent and serial killer-hunter Ethan Thomas does lighten the mood a little – at least until you discover that Thomas has been suspended from his job due to the discovery of suspicious evidence linking him to the killer he's currently tracking.

To turn the screw even tighter, *Condemned* plays out its action from an entirely first-person perspective – not that you'd be able to tell from many of the screens shown here, admittedly – as Thomas attempts to unravel the mystery on his own, meaning that you get an up-close-and-personal view of everything that happens. Viewpoint and scare factor aside, though, the game is far from what some people might expect; this isn't the interaction-free, shotgun-blasting world of *Doom 3*, by any means.

"The game is played in the first person, but to call it a first-person shooter is incorrect," insists Frank Rooke, *Condemned*'s lead game designer. "It's a psychological thriller and the main thing that defines what that means is the pacing of our game. The pacing in most FPS games is rather quick; when a player is walking through a space, enemies are just thrown at them and it's more action-orientated. What we're trying to do here is to tell a story and let the tension, the anticipation of these encounters, build up to where when you finally have an encounter it's more of a release and it actually means something. By doing that, it actually slows the pacing down and makes things more methodical, more thought-provoking and, in the end, the atmosphere has a chance to sink into the player, which enriches the overall experience."

Atmosphere – the word that popped up the most during our visit to Monolith (besides perhaps 'visceral'), but with good reason that we should probably explain. First though, a question: would you call us liars if we suggested that *Condemned*, even at this early pre-Alpha stage, looked as nice as (if not nicer than) *Half-Life 2* running on a high-end PC? Going from the screens on these pages, it's more than possible, but let us assure you that it's the truth; in action, *Condemned* looks unbelievably detailed and beautiful.

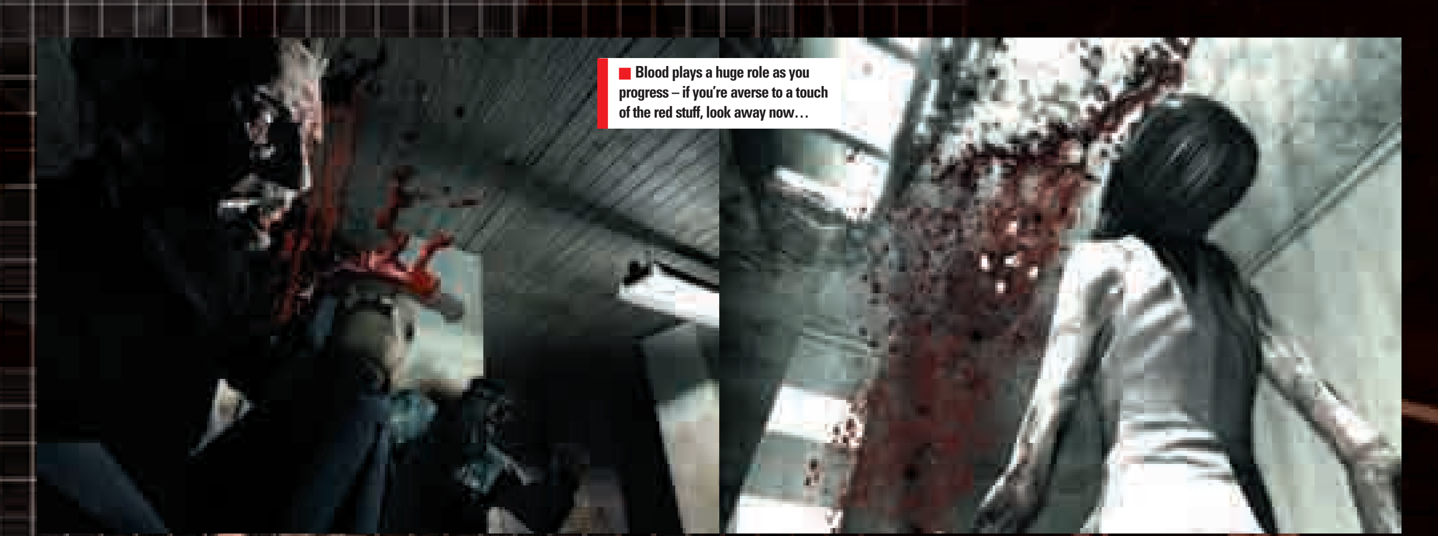
The strange thing is, it takes some adjustment – were Monolith to sit us down in front of a keyboard and mouse we'd feel perfectly at home, but manoeuvring such high-resolution environments with a joypad, knowing that this is actually a console, feels just, well, wrong. But wrong in the right kind of way, if that makes sense.

Of course, it's not just the graphical clarity that helps create *Condemned*'s incredibly tense atmosphere – that can also be put down to the huge amount of real-time lighting effects (or, indeed, the lack of them in certain darker areas), disconcerting musical score and sheer ferocity of the enemy AI. However, the step forward in graphics does make a difference, and not just in how this game looks.

"We are grasping the visual fidelity first and foremost with *Condemned*," says David Hasle, the game's producer. "The combat, for instance, is something that we dreamed of doing before, which is a

THE CLUES ARE THERE

As any *CSI* fan will know, the key to solving a murder lies in the forensics – something that you get to do first-hand in *Condemned*. Thankfully, it's balanced enough to prevent things becoming too simple or an overwhelming pixel hunt; by using your UV camera you can detect clues (blood stains, fingerprints, scrape marks and so on) that can be sent back to the lab for analysis, which then advances the story without the need for clunky cut-scenes or exposition. Just because you're looking for clues, though, doesn't mean the action gets put on hold. "It's not just 'do forensics, then do combat'," insists Derek Chatwood, one of *Condemned*'s five-strong level design team. "It's all integrated together so at any time you can be searching for a clue and suddenly, 'whack!', someone hits you in the head because you weren't paying attention."



Blood plays a huge role as you progress – if you're averse to a touch of the red stuff, look away now…

melee combat system that really gets in your face. We couldn't really pull that off before. You can imagine on the PS2 if you had an enemy coming right up close and grabbing you, clawing at your face, you'd see stretching and low pixelation and it just wouldn't look good, but this is going to be convincing; it's going to be a level of immersion that hasn't been seen before, so I'm really excited about that."

Surprisingly, so are we. First-person melee combat has never really been executed so well that you get that raw

THE WORLD OF THE REAL

Monolith is keen to stress that much of its development work has been spent trying to create a realistic environment for players to explore – not just through use of texturing and lighting, but also through the game's complex enemy AI systems. "The universe is a real fallen utopia – there are these derelict buildings across these entire stretches of the city, and while you're trying to follow the path of this murderer it just happens to take you into some of these incredibly hostile environments," says level designer Alexander Pfeiffer. "I think the more sense we can give that these are lived-in spaces, [that] these denizens are living in the space that you're interrupting, that's really going to sell the realism. You're interrupting their lives as you're going through, plus they're homicidal so that's going to provoke a reaction." 'Provoke a reaction'? That's putting it mildly…

"TO BRING OUT A GAME WITH THE SAME LEVEL OF SOPHISTICATION AS A FILM, A PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER FOR A GAMES CONSOLE – THAT'S PRETTY DAMN COOL"

DAVID HASLE, PRODUCER, MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

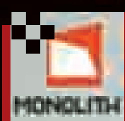
feeling of hitting someone in the face with something and then having them hit you back (although Vivendi's *Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* came pretty close). *Condemned* comes as near as we've seen to hitting the nail – or even enemy – on the head. The ideal word would probably be 'brutality'. Starting from the moment you tear a piece of the scenery off the wall to use as weapon and then continuing into every encounter you have, the game's violent way of how both the enemy and your own character reacts depending on each strike had us wincing on more than one occasion. For a developer so used to creating FPS games, this is a markedly different approach to first-person combat, although that's not to say it hasn't given in to its weakness completely.

"We do have firearms, although they're more like the valuable gems you find in an adventure title," admits Rooke. "Originally, we started off thinking we were going to have a lot of firearms and wanted to have this melee system being supportive to the firearms, but since it was fairly successful for us, it's swapped and now the firearms are more supplemental to the melee, which actually broadens the kind of experience you can have during a violent encounter."

Having to take advantage of the opportunistic environment to supply your weaponry (be it pipe, board, axe or even shotgun) certainly does help to maintain that level of atmosphere throughout each level, if only because you know only too well that an enemy could strike at any time and find something bigger to pummel you with. Not only that, but there's the exploration element to take into consideration – you've got a case to solve, first and foremost, which means venturing deep into some of the most delapidated parts of *Condemned*'s world.

That said, areas of urban decay, as well as the textures and elements contained within, have actually been based upon real areas near Monolith's home town, which naturally comes as quite an interesting shock (the developer hired a film location scout to find just the right places for it to send its team for inspiration). But this only serves to prove that Monolith is determined to ground *Condemned* in as much realism as possible to get it off on the right atmospheric foot.

"Like anything else, you start somewhere and then build on top of that, because it inspires you to go that one step further," says Rooke. "These spaces don't exist in Seattle, but their core and foundation was inspired by something that we saw; it'd be a really scary place if they did. I hate for you to think that Seattle is actually like that…" Obviously, he hasn't bumped into the same prescient homeless guy we did, then.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1994 and based in Kirkland, Washington, Monolith Productions has spent the last ten years evolving from its original publishing and developing roots into a firm focused specifically on game development. Games such as *TRON 2.0*, *No One Lives Forever* and *Aliens Vs Predator 2* have helped bolster the studio's reputation for quality.

HISTORY

- THE MATRIX ONLINE 2005 [PC]
- TRON 2.0 2003 [PC]
- NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2 2002 [PC]

■ Here's a first for first-person melee combat – it all actually looks like it really hurts.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WHAT MAKES A MAN TURN TO MURDER?

THE X-FILES + DOOM 3 - GUNPLAY = CONDEMNED

■ Stoving in someone's head with a shovel – not exactly PC, but certainly very satisfying.

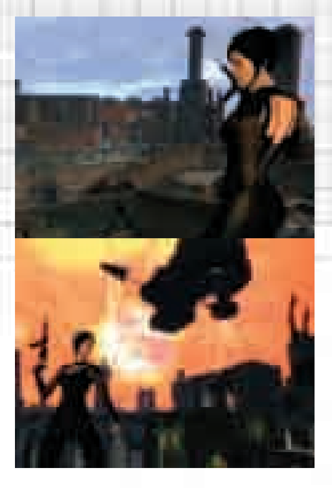
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

AEON FLUX

NOW OFFICIALLY 'NOT WEIRD'

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Terminal Reality
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



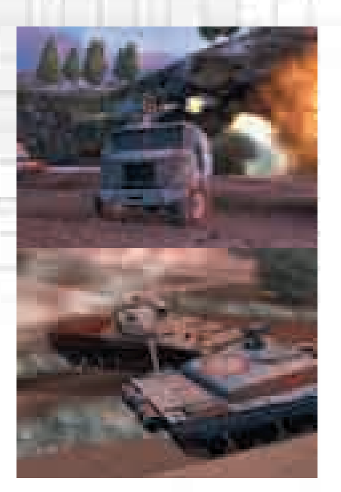
We'd like to think that some of you remember the MTV-related bizarreness that was the *Aeon Flux* cartoon, but that's probably not the case. As weird and confusing as it was wonderfully drawn it really was something special, which is why these screenshots of the newly announced game of the franchise leave us rather disappointed. Based on the upcoming film as opposed to the cartoon, Aeon Flux appears to have become just another futuristic heroine laden with weaponry – hardly what fans of the original concept want to hear – and will perform all kinds of acrobatics and blood-letting. Sound familiar? Considering it's being made by the company behind *Bloodrayne*, it should… and not in a good way.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

FIRED UP

FOR THE DRIVE OF YOUR LIFE

Format: PSP
Origin: UK
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: SCEE London Studio
Genre: Shoot-'Em-Up
Players: 1-8



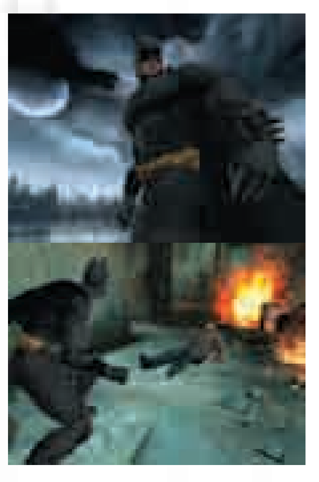
Sony's online support for the PS2 might not amount to much, but there's no denying that *Hardware* still stands as one of the best broadband-enabled games on the machine. Lots of vehicles, lots of explosions and plenty of multiplayer shenanigans… how could anything go wrong? That's why it's no surprise that the PSP is soon due to play host to *Fired Up* – essentially a refined version of *Hardware* complete with plenty of new vehicles and weapons to use, eight-player Wi-Fi multiplayer action and a 'proper' single-player mode focused on you undertaking missions for various characters and blowing things up. Think *Twisted Metal* only playable rather than repetitive and you're on the right track. Or at least, we hope so.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

BATMAN BEGINS

'HOLY EA FILM LICENCES!'

Format: PS2, Xbox, Cube, GBA
Origin: US
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Eurocom
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



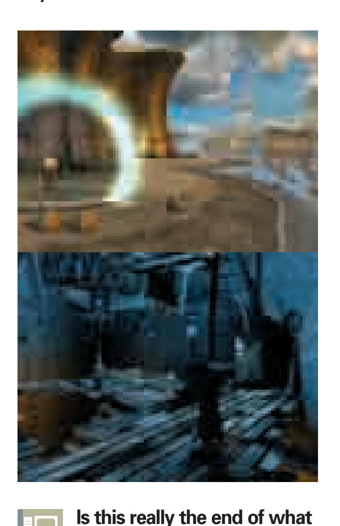
Let's just get one thing perfectly clear – we're looking forward to the *Batman Begins* movie more than any other film this year. As such, the thought of a game based on the film naturally fills us with all kinds of dread; not in the least because we had the 'pleasure' of having to play *Catwoman* not so long ago. Even worse, Electronic Arts hasn't released any details about what this game will entail aside from saying the film's 'style, drama and action' will help to define the title – a confidence booster if ever we heard one. Therefore, we'll just issue a plea: please, Eurocom, don't mess this up. If you do, we doubt the fall-out is going to be pretty.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

MYST V: END OF AGES

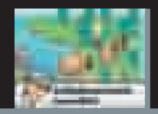
THIS IS THE END, MY FRIEND

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Cyan Worlds
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1



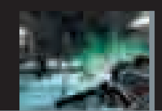
Is this really the end of what has become a highly revered franchise among puzzle fans around the world? Developer Cyan Worlds certainly seems to think so, with company founder and *Myst* star Rand Miller leading the way for the final episode. Strangely, the fifth game in the series – not counting *Uru* – picks up where the first one left off, with players being challenged to help restore the lost empire of the D'ni through a succession of complicated puzzles, riddles and other mind-bending tasks. Using an enhanced version of the *Myst IV* engine to help create a beautifully rendered 3D environment, the game already looks gorgeous; we just hope it can live up to the expectations of the *Myst* fanatics.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05



Dated – Pirate Battle (GBA)

■ Pirates are great, but *Advance Wars* with pirates is even better – especially since Majesco has announced that its long-awaited *Pirate Battle* will finally be released in September. Yarrr.



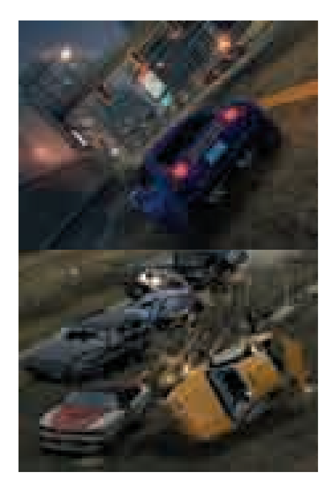
Dated – Geist (GameCube)

■ Aside from its showing at last year's E3, Nintendo's ghostly shooter has been kept under wraps, so the fact that it's due out at the end of June is slightly worrying.

BURNOUT REVENGE

QUICK OFF THE STARTING LINE

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Criterion Games
Genre: Racing
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



Another *Burnout* game already? Less than a year after the last one? Before we start tutting disapprovingly about Electronic Arts turning the franchise into the next *FIFA*, though, we can at least feel safe in the knowledge that Criterion Games has its hands firmly on the reins of *Burnout Revenge* and that the game is likely to be as fast and crash-filled as the last one, if not more so. No doubt this will come as horrible news to those who stand by the belief that *Burnout 2* is still the best in the series, but that's not us – although even we have to admit that the all-new Revenge mode that sees you take out frustrations on the surrounding traffic might be going just a tad too far.

RELEASE DATE: SEPT '05

AMERICA'S ARMY: RISE OF A SOLDIER

MMM, FRIENDLY FIRE

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Secret Level
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-16



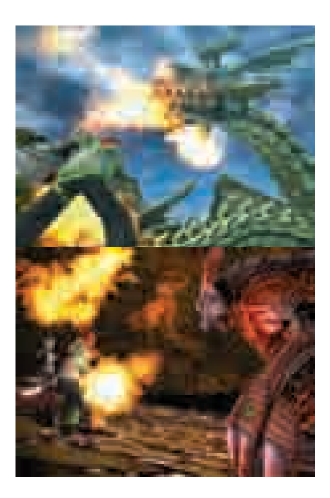
We wondered how long it would take for an enterprising publisher to bring *America's Army* (an uber-realistic army FPS for the PC, accused by some of training gamers for armed combat) to home consoles. That the publisher has turned out to Ubisoft is surprising to say the least, but at least its experience with the *Tom Clancy* games and *Brothers In Arms* puts it in a good position for such a simulation. Offering what claims to be the most realistic and non-linear combat scenarios ever seen in a game, an all-new career mode is set to be added in order to keep console players engrossed – something that'll no doubt prove useful in keeping those short attention spans happy.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

IT'S AN ONLINE/OFFLINE THING

Format: PS2, PC
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Genre: RPG
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)





We've had something of a love/hate relationship with *Phantasy Star Online* ever since it appeared on the Dreamcast. However, the unveiling of *Phantasy Star Universe* has massively renewed our interest in the *Phantasy Star* series, simply because Sonic Team has done the best for everyone and created what seems to be two games in one. Online players still have the thrills of a *PSO*-style experience to dig into, but those only able to play offline will get to enjoy a fully developed multi-planet adventure of their own instead of just being saddled with a whittled-down version of the online mode. It's everything *Phantasy Star* fans could have asked for, according to Sonic Team, and we don't doubt it for a second.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '06

SHOGUN WARRIOR: THE LOST ARMY

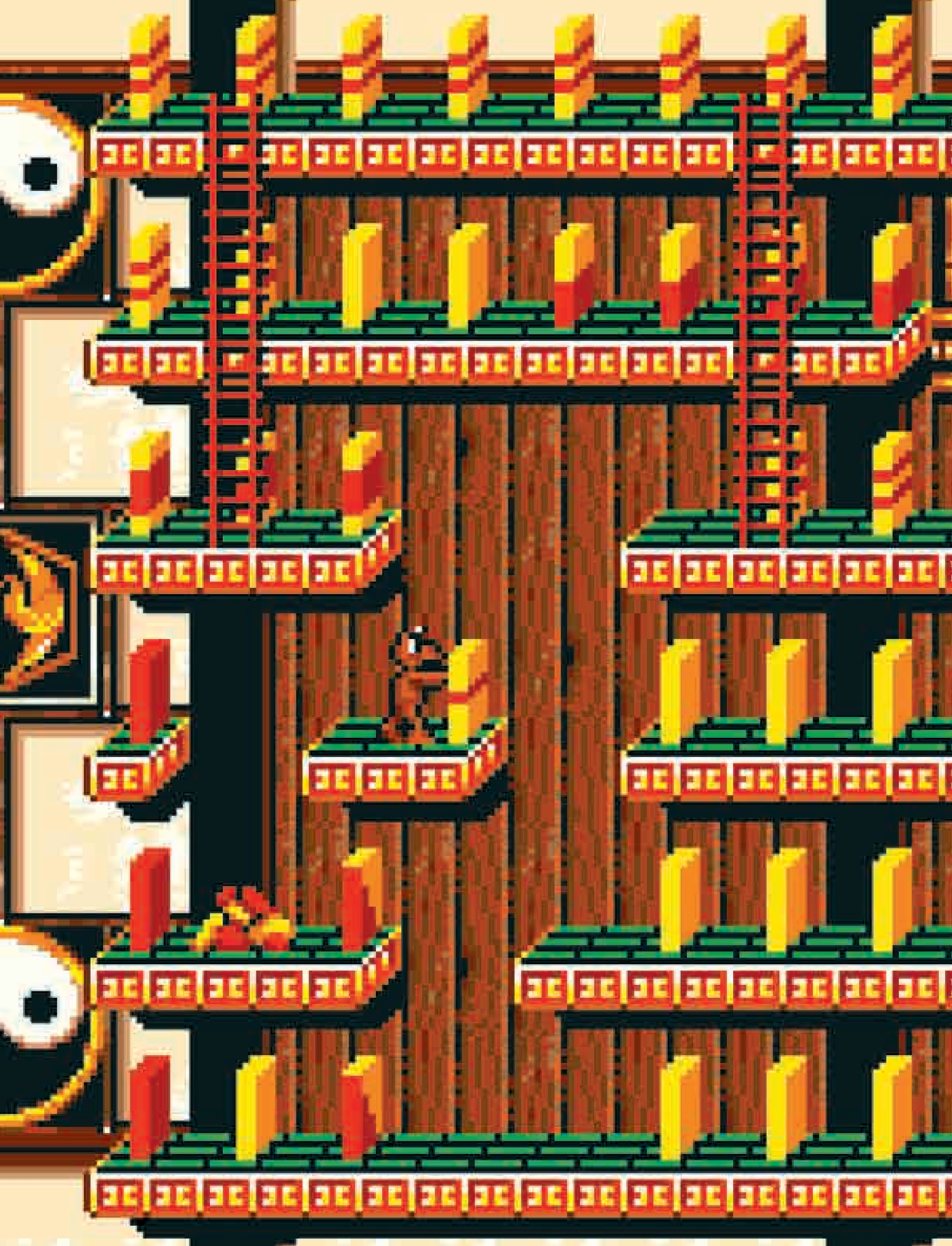
BIG ARMY, SMALL STYLUS

Format: DS
Origin: US
Publisher: Namco Hometek
Developer: Box Clever Interactive
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-8



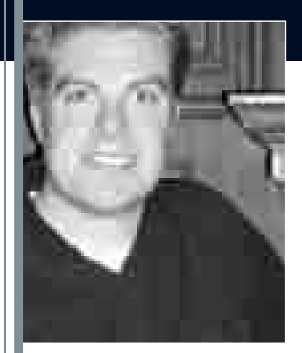
There's no doubt that the DS needs plenty more games that use its touch-screen functionality in a non-frivolous way, but we're not entirely convinced that *Shogun Warrior* is what we mean. On paper, certainly, it appears to make sense – combining the best ideas of *Kessen*, *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms* and even Risk, the strategy aspect is perfectly suited to the DS's lower touch screen while the 3D action takes place on the top screen. Even so, you have to wonder whether it's something that will interest DS owners outside Japan, especially since the last thing Nintendo's new handheld needs is another clanger of a title after the likes of *Sprung*, *The Urbz* or *Asphalt Urban GT*.

RELEASE DATE: OCT '05





Dominoes wobble but they don't fall down **Pushover – Amiga [Ocean] 1992**



The Players

THE ARRIVAL OF A NEW GENERATION OF HANDHELDS MEANS A WHOLE HOST OF NEW CHALLENGES FOR DEVELOPERS TO OVERCOME. FEW MEN REALISE THIS MORE THAN EA'S TEAM FUSION PRODUCER DAVE MCCARTHY…



DAVE MCCARTHY

ELECTRONIC ARTS /TEAM FUSION

There aren't many companies in the videogame industry that could afford to create a whole new section to deal solely with the development of handheld titles, but one that certainly could is Electronic Arts. And guess what? That's exactly what it's done.

Back in September 2003, Team Fusion was created when EA brought producers Warren Wall and Dave McCarthy together – that was it, just the two of them. Now, a year and a half later, Team Fusion is made up of over 200 programmers and game designers – EA certainly knows how to throw together a team. The scale of this studio is a good indication of how seriously EA is taking the handheld market this time around, so we decided to track down Dave McCarthy to find out what warrants such an effort.

"I think that Team Fusion is important for a few reasons," McCarthy begins. "We could have treated the PSP launch titles we're working on internally as if they were just to be released on another platform, but the danger of doing this with these titles is that there would be a chance of competing priorities within teams and the games might not have got the attention that they needed."

After starting as an assistant producer on *FIFA 97* back in 1996, Dave has been working on EA Sports titles non-stop. "Being the good Canadian kid I am, I just had to spend time on NHL franchise" he smiles, but this commitment to the genre made him the perfect man to take on EA Sports' range of PSP launch titles.

"Having a standalone group allows us to give the titles the attention they deserve," he says. "I also think – and this has been my big learning experience over this past year – creating a compelling handheld title is a very different story from the big console games that I started on. There are things that need to be learnt, and as a separate group we can be dedicated and focus on the job at hand."

One thing that's been a concern of many gamers regarding all handhelds is whether we're going to get to a stage where we're just getting ports of old titles. It's a situation that's bothered GBA owners over the last year or so, so while we have one of the guys responsible for making these decisions sat in front of us, we decide to pin him down. So, will this be the case, Mr McCarthy?

"If I go out as a consumer, as I do, I like to think that there are people out there who are trying to provide me with something new. Besides, with the new handhelds, many games simply wouldn't port well – it wouldn't work. Handhelds are played differently from consoles and the games should reflect this. You get interrupted a lot and you play for shorter amounts of time on a handheld. There just have to be changes if you want titles to work." It sounds like a positive answer, but it'll take more than a few minor tweaks to convince gamers to hand over their cash for a title that was beaten years ago.

A company that certainly understands the changes needed to make a worthy handheld title is Nintendo. The DS has been designed with short periods of play in mind and the bulk of its titles reflect this by playing much like mini-games – not exactly the type of game for which EA is known. Fair enough, the odd title – such as *Tiger Woods* – has made its way onto the DS, but EA certainly seems to be concentrating its efforts on the PSP. "I certainly see value in the [DS]," McCarthy tells us. "I guess it just feels as if it's aimed at a different audience. We do have games coming out for the DS. The PSP is just a particularly strong fit for our games and content."

All this makes little difference to us here in the UK. Thanks to Sony's delay of the PSP's European launch, many of us still have a while to wait before we can take advantage of McCarthy's work. But this doesn't mean he'll have a chance to take it easy though. The handheld battle rages on and the rest of the world will be waiting for new titles tailor-made for shortening long flights and making bus rides seem that little bit more entertaining.

"After a bit of rest we'll be right back with a good selection of titles in time for Christmas," McCarthy assures us. "We're also looking at new and exciting IT opportunities so there's no shortage of work to do…"

"THE PSP MAKES THINGS LOOK GOOD. I AM PROUD OF THE LEVEL OF VISUAL QUALITY WE'VE ACHIEVED HERE IN ROUND ONE"
DAVE MCCARTHY



THE GREEN ROOM

THREE DEVELOPERS. THREE ATTITUDES. ONE CONSOLE. THE INDUSTRY OPINION ON MICROSOFT'S NEXT-GENERATION HARDWARE IS REVEALED HERE…



Monolith Productions [FPS experts]

Condemned [horror shocker]

MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

Founded in 1994 in Kirkland, Washington, Monolith's current status as a developer is more concentrated than it has been in the past. Originally working in conjunction with Microsoft on a new set of development tools that would later become the LithTech Development System, Monolith started out both developing and publishing its own titles. However, the increased pressure that both responsibilities carried led to the studio being reorganised solely around game development, with the LithTech division eventually breaking off to form an independent company. Today, Monolith remains an independent developer with many ties to important publishers, and has its own departments for massively multiplayer gaming, audio creation and motion capture.

David Hasle has worked at Monolith for two years and is now producer of the next-gen title *Condemned*.

"MICROSOFT ARE UPHOLDING THEIR END OF THE BARGAIN IN TERMS OF WHAT THEY TOLD US – IT'S BEEN A REALLY GOOD BACK-AND-FORTH PROCESS"

DAVID HASLE, PRODUCER, MONOLITH GAMES

Enough of the speculation. By the time you read this, everyone who's interested will know all they need to know about the Xbox 360 hardware design, specifications and other technical jargon that gets them going… or, at least, as much as Microsoft has been willing to show, behind all the showboating, celebrity glitz and live music performances.

But, of course, the only people really qualified to talk about the machine, how it works and what it can do are those actually using it – those responsible for creating what is already looking to be a strong launch line-up for the console. Without their views, it's all just a bunch of figures that don't really mean that much – surely someone should try speaking to these people?

So we did. And after much cajoling, we managed to convince three key members of the development teams behind *Condemned*, *Saint's Row* and *The Outfit* to sit around the same table and discuss their thoughts on the Xbox 360's shot at stealing the console spotlight, what kind of new approaches it offers them and even whether Microsoft is doing the right thing by making the first move …

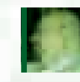
Those in the know are Jeff Brown, lead designer at Relic Entertainment, David Hasle, producer at Monolith Productions, and Alan Lawrence, a programmer from Volition.

games™ The biggest concern so far about Microsoft's next console is that everyone who has talked about it is only focusing on the improvements in graphics – is that all there is to the machine? What else will it allow developers to do in terms of creativity?



David Hasle I think the big reason why you have an emphasis on the graphics is because there's a strong push on taking over your living room with the next generation of consoles. We're already hearing rumours that the next-gen consoles are going to be around for ten years, because the curve – the jumps in visual fidelity – aren't as dramatic as they used to be and there's not that much more you're going to be able to do by providing additional horsepower, except push more polygons and so on.

Essentially, then, it's all going to be about who owns the living room – is it going to be Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo? You just don't know. But everyone is fighting to release not just a console, but a console tied in with that high-definition television where you get this beautiful experience at 720i resolution – your guess is as good as mine in terms of whether anyone's going to be successful with that.



Jeff Brown Even so, it's certainly not just graphics… although actually even the graphical improvements have had some serious gameplay implications, such as widescreen gameplay – it really opens things up and changes the way you play, especially in shooters. Also, the interaction of multiple processors is really going to let us do things that you've never seen in the

Relic Entertainment
[strategy kings]

The Outfit
[wartime epic]

past; we can run three different physics engines at the same time to handle the different things that each is good at, and there's no way this could have been done on the last generation of hardware. We can run a hell of a lot more stuff now.

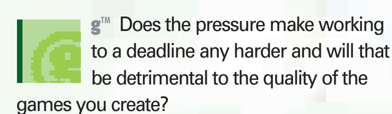
Alan Lawrance The other thing that's specific to the Xenon [development name for Xbox 360] is the Live component. There's an infrastructure there that we can really build on to make an amazingly compelling online experience. Microsoft has done a really good job with this – it's something we've definitely taken advantage of.



g™ What kind of pressures or benefits is the Xbox 360 offering you in terms of development time and costs?



AL It's a different world. Next-gen content is just far more intensive; you need much larger teams because the assets have become so much more detailed and this takes a very long time. I guess it's a double-edged sword – we can do so much more than we could on previous consoles, but it takes a lot more work. The deadline pressure is still there of course, but I guess it is harder because everything is so complex and budgets are going way up. There's more pressure to ensure that what you make pays off.



g™ Does the pressure make working to a deadline any harder and will that be detrimental to the quality of the games you create?

DH Pressure definitely makes it harder. Doing a launch title, in our case, you're dealing with a shortened development schedule because you're never going to get the technical support you need as fast as you need it. We would have liked the Alpha development kits at least a year before development – [although] we started getting ours last November. We would like to have Beta kits at least six months before the game ships – hypothetically, though, they should be here by late June, but then we have to start hitting certain milestones in late July and August so we're gold by September ready for when it hits the stores in November… it's a lot of pressure. The most challenging part for me that I really enjoy as a producer, though, and where we pool a lot of our experience is in making the right decision first; we can't get touchy-feely and experiment with different combat styles and graphics and whatever, so we've got to make the right choice if we're going to hit the schedule.

JB But it's a trade-off – the quality will be much higher and with a launch title that has strict deadlines it may restrict the amount you have in the game. What's there is extremely high quality, but there may not be as much of it. I think that's a good thing for gamers. Publishers are going to have to be much more selective about the games that they are putting out there – quality is going to go up and up.

g™ Is Microsoft providing any kind of development support? And has it placed any ground rules on you over development that you're having to adhere to that are making things harder?

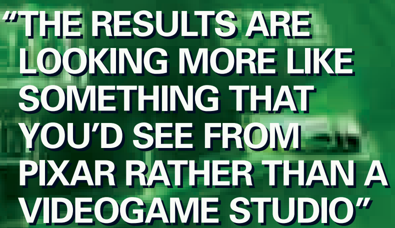


AL I don't want to slam any other companies but Microsoft is the best I've worked with to date.

Jeff Brown [lead designer]

RELIC ENTERTAINMENT

As a company with its foundations built on a passion for real-rime strategy gaming, Relic has a well-respected reputation within the genre in the industry. Established in 1997 by Alex Garden and Luke Moloney, the Vancouver-based company debuted in 1999 with *Homeworld* – a space-based RTS that received several Game Of The Year accolades and much praise from the gaming press and players alike. Other titles such as *Dawn Of War* and *Impossible Creatures* have expanded Relic's creativity, while remaining true to its RTS roots. Not surprisingly, such success caught the eye of several publishers, and in 2004 THQ finalised a deal that would give the developer more financial support for its future projects. Jeff Brown is Relic's lead designer on *The Outfit*, having previously worked on *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War* and *Homeworld 2*.



"THE RESULTS ARE LOOKING MORE LIKE SOMETHING THAT YOU'D SEE FROM PIXAR RATHER THAN A VIDEOGAME STUDIO"

JEFF BROWN, LEAD DESIGNER, RELIC ENTERTAINMENT

JB Yeah, Microsoft is terrific; we can ask any questions we want and the turn-around time is about an hour. They have been to see us quite a few times just to help us out. They don't tell us what to do, but they do make suggestions based on where they think we fit in their portfolio. In general, it's like they want developers to push the development of games while they push the hardware.

DH We've been getting really, really good support too. The only ground rule really is Xbox Live – it doesn't mean [Microsoft] are forcing multiplayer modes on you, just that they're betting on Xbox Live continuing to grow exponentially, so all games that are coming out go beyond being 'Live aware' with new contents… that's been all been talked about at GDC, which is to their credit. It's a very smart business decision for Microsoft, because they're actually building an economic system out of their online space.

They're enabling micro-transactions where you can buy a card for $50 that gives you 100,000 points or whatever on Xbox Live, and then you can spend those points on premium content when it comes out, therefore Microsoft creates a steady stream of income through a self-contained economy base that they get to control. I mean, here is a place with Xbox Live where you can download game demos to your hard drive, download trailers or maybe even buy an entire game online, download it and keep it on your hard drive – and that's pretty sweet.

g™ Obviously, there are different schools of thought when it comes to the next-generation race – Microsoft has taken a very straightforward approach by improving the technology and enhancing processing, while Nintendo appears to be focusing on gameplay and innovation. Is there room for both approaches, or do you think that one will eventually overcome the other?

AL Saying that Microsoft is only focusing on technology isn't really a fair characterisation. Technology is a large part of the next generation, admittedly, but Microsoft has made it very clear that they think fun is very important. We can't just make a pretty game and forget about everything else.

JB I think there's room for multiple approaches – for instance, I think we're going to see something different again from Sony with the PS3. What Microsoft is really pushing is community: it's about 'our box, your way'. I'll be interested to see what Nintendo do in the future, but at the moment I think it's a two horse race between Microsoft and Sony – unless Nintendo can somehow regain the early dominance they had with consoles, of course. Plus, as we move



Alan Lawrance [programmer]

VOLITION INC.

Based in Champaign, Illinois, Volition's history dates back to the founding of Parallax Software in 1993 by Mike Kulas and Matt Toschlog. Having worked on various titles for LookingGlass Technologies (including *Ultima Underworld* and *Car & Driver*), the pair set up their own company and pitched the idea for *Descent* to several publishers, eventually seeing it picked up by Apogee Software. Development began and upon release in 1995, *Descent* earned a number of awards and critical acclaim, quickly becoming one of the most popular online multiplayer games. Not long after, in 1996, Parallax Software split into two studios, one of which was Volition. Volition formed close ties with THQ and, after developing *Summoner* and *Red Faction*, was bought by the publisher in 2000.
Alan Lawrance is one of the key programming staff working on the development of *Saint's Row* and has worked at Volition for several years.

"RUNNING AT HDTV RESOLUTION IS CHALLENGING BUT THE GOOD THING IS THAT THE MACHINE IS VERY POWERFUL, SO IT'S NOT A BIG WORRY"
ALAN LAWRANCE, PROGRAMMER, VOLITION

to the next-gen consoles we're seeing more divergence. It's going to make things hard for us. I doubt many games are going to work well on all formats; in my view, you're going to see many more format-specific titles.

DH Innovation is really tricky – if someone like Nintendo does something like you have to put a suction cup on your forehead and twist your head to control it… it might be cool and work well, but getting people to try it might be difficult. It's the same thing as automobile design. The automobiles being driven today are very similar to those that were around 60 years ago with the gas, brake and steering wheel – there are lots of ways that make all that so much easier to do, but none of them actually get into the marketplace because we're used to driving the way we do. Even the idea of a heads-up display popping up on the windshield… fighter jets have been using it for years, but it came and went in cars because people like to see all the dials and stuff.

Personally, I'd go for the tried-and-true and hope we can innovate based on the proven technologies, which will ultimately support our practices – I love the idea of being able to innovate, but I need to have the money to help me innovate and the only way to get that money is to do something more tried-and-tested so I have a stronger broad-base appeal in the marketplace.

g™ When it came to getting your game into development, was it a case of you approaching Microsoft with ideas, or did Microsoft pick out your particular project for its next-gen system?

JB We approached Microsoft in December 2003. They immediately started supporting us by telling us what PCs to put together and things, but I'm not sure exactly when we got the dev kits. You always want the final hardware a lot earlier than you get it. But I guess everyone will get the hardware at the same time, so all developers are on a level playing field. That's just how Microsoft likes to do things.

AL For us, it was a combination. Because we're owned by THQ, the existing relationship between the two companies kind of made things happen. It was a mutual thing.

g™ What's your take on Microsoft 'shooting first' in the next-generation battle? Considering the original Xbox still has plenty of potential, has it moved too soon?

DH They're doing the right thing. They were perceived before as a 'me too' console manufacturer, but now they get a chance to

Saint's Row
[street violence]

Volition
[action jackson]

establish themselves as the first and foremost of the next generation, plus they've got the deep pockets that can ride that wave for a while.

Honestly, they need to get out before the PlayStation3. If they make 2005 then they'll be supporting Xbox and Xbox 360 – they can probably carry a two-year transition between those two formats.

AL I think that it's actually already been confirmed that Xbox games will be available throughout 2007 and there's always some level of overlap between generations. Whether it proves to be a good decision? I don't know, I guess time will tell on that one.

There's definitely an advantage to being out first but in the end I think it'll all come down to the games. In the past, Sony was out first and it served them very well. It'll be interesting to see which way things are going to go this time.

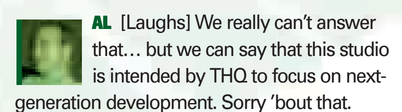


JB It's certainly not too soon for us. Getting in on the ground floor of a console is great. In terms of their strategy, Microsoft probably feels that it missed out last time by coming out late and giving Sony a 30 million-console lead. We'll see. I think it's interesting.

North America is certainly ready for it – everywhere you look you see high definition televisions. Though I've heard plenty of jokes about the lack of high definition TVs in Europe…



g™ Finally, do you have any plans for other next-gen development, not just Xbox 360?



AL [Laughs] We really can't answer that… but we can say that this studio is intended by THQ to focus on next-generation development. Sorry 'bout that.

JB It's the same here – we do have plans but my boss would shoot me if I spoke about them. I know we won't be able to port our current title straight to any other format; there's going to be too many differences. I guess we just don't know enough about the PlayStation3 at the moment – maybe after E3 we'll know more.

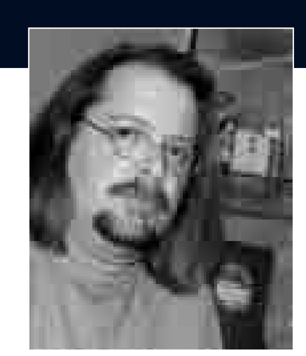


DH It's true, PS3 is a complete unknown right now, so it's a big issue at this point and we really need to get our hands on that technology to understand what's really involved with that. Obviously, though, we will do PlayStation3 support – if you're going to make products and you want broad-base sales, you're going to make them for the biggest platforms out there. Between Xbox and PC, it's not really that difficult; we've got a really strong content pipeline that's actually built to support both platforms and it's working really well for us, so that's not an issue.



"IF YOU WANT TO TREAT YOUR WORKERS LIKE NAMELESS COGS THEN YOU SHOULD BE MAKING COAT HANGERS"

STEVE REID



The Players

WE'VE SPENT MANY HAPPY HOURS GUNNING DOWN FRIENDS AND STRANGERS ALIKE WHILE WRAPPED UP IN VARIOUS TOM CLANCY-INFLUENCED WORLDS. GAMES™ MEETS ONE OF THE MEN WHO MADE IT ALL POSSIBLE…

STEVE REID

RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT

With Red Storm now recognised as one of the world's leading developers, it's hard to believe that when its doors first opened in 1996 less than 20 people were in the company's employment and there was only just enough money to keep things going for six months. It's a horrible thought, but can you imagine what Xbox Live would be like without Red Storm? Can you even conceive a day without *Ghost Recon* or *Rainbow Six*? Nope, nor can we.

"The first years gave the original employees all of the challenges being involved with the starting of a business" Steve Reid, managing director at Red Storm begins. "If our games didn't sell, we would have been just another footnote in the history of gaming. To make it even more difficult on ourselves, we set our goals high."

Very high, in fact. Rather than just settling for throwing a few titles at the gaming public and finding their feet, the Red Storm team planned from the very start to create a franchise. "We didn't just want to make games, and this was a very difficult decision," Reid tells us. "Add to that the fact that we were extremely 'experimental' with marketing and it's no surprise that we almost put ourselves out of business. But we survived and succeeded. As a studio, we've been through it all."

Having the will to continue when things were so tough paid off and things started to go well. Red Storm ceased to be an independent company at the end of 2000 when it was acquired by Ubisoft. "Before Red Storm was purchased we were developing, publishing and even distributing our own games," Reid remembers. "This gave us the business maturity to make the transition to a studio for Ubisoft. It was a mutually beneficial acquisition situation: the Red Storm board wanted to sell, the studio wanted to keep developing and Ubisoft wanted to expand its portfolio to include games from the FPS genre – something that suited us just fine."

The acquisition of smaller studios by large companies doesn't always go this well. Development horror stories involving rushed deadlines and lack of creative control are something we're used to hearing about in interviews, but it seems Ubisoft is going about things the right way.

"Ubisoft looks to Red Storm to be the experts within our genre," Reid explains. "Red Storm doesn't have total control over our schedule or projects, but we do have excellent collaboration with Ubisoft's worldwide studios. The management controls things like scope and priority and then we get the big assignment – making the magic happen."

Anyone who's been playing games over the last few years is probably well aware of the "magic" Steve is speaking of. The *Ghost Recon* and *Rainbow Six* games have been among Ubisoft's best-selling titles and it looks as if there's still plenty of life in both series.

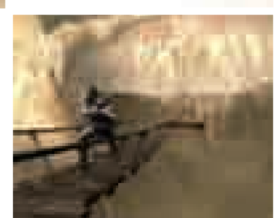
"We've won some awards and sold a few million games – that's a great feeling," Reid admits. "With the competition in military games increasing, we often get asked about how this might influence our future. We would like to think that others are joining the genre because they've seen our success. As a result of their realism, combat games are a classic theme and are here to stay."

To date the *Rainbow Six* series has been met with praise at every step, but with the last game – *Rainbow Six 3* – being such a success is Steve worried that the forthcoming sequel may not live up to the fans' expectations?

"The scariest thing – beyond the threats of bodily harm from some of our overly enthusiastic 'fans' surrounding feature changes – might be the impact that we can have on some people," Reid says with a smile. "The fans are great. In fact, most of us are cut from the same cloth. If we give them a great game, they will play it forever. The online postings can be a bit harsh sometimes, but we try to remember that it's their appreciation of our products that drives them to this rabid-dog state of enthusiasm. People need a release. People want to play the hero. They want to save the world. We just give them the opportunity to do so. "

Rainbow Six: Lockdown is out in June on Xbox and PS2 and was previewed in issue 28.









REVIEWS

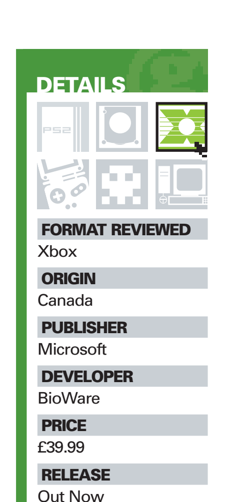
THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, games™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



I KNOW KUNG FU – AND SO DOES BIOWARE

JADE EMPIRE



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
BioWare

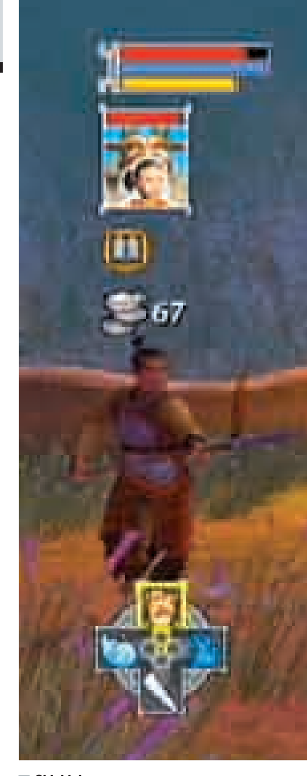
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

As we've said before and will no doubt say again, Western videogame developers just haven't grasped the knack of emulating that magical spark of life that's found in many Japanese games. To our minds, many Western games are too heavy handed and patronising in their presentation and execution, although that may suggest something more about the markets they're aiming at rather than just the developers' methods. That said, there's a vast difference between trying to copy Eastern stylisation and simply being influenced by it. While something like Climax's *Sudeki* amply demonstrates the problems that can arise when a Western developer tries to create an Eastern-style RPG (bland character design and pallid gameplay being the two biggest issues), *Jade Empire* perfectly illustrates BioWare's understanding of where the line has to be drawn between imitation and influence.

Make no mistake about it, *Jade Empire* is not an RPG in the same mould as *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest*, although we'd hope you knew that already. It doesn't enjoy the subtle nuances or massive scale that you would expect to find in Namco's *Tales* series or Nippon Ichi's *Disgaea*. It doesn't even attempt to hide the fact that underneath the layers of martial arts and philosophy it's still, first and foremost, a BioWare game with the same ideals and structure as many of the developer's previous successes (*Knights Of The Old Republic*, *Baldur's Gate*). What it does have, though, is a great respect for its subject matter, an elegance that belies its rather more traditional underlying role-playing conventions,



Sidekicks can prove particularly useful in battle, especially if they're huge.

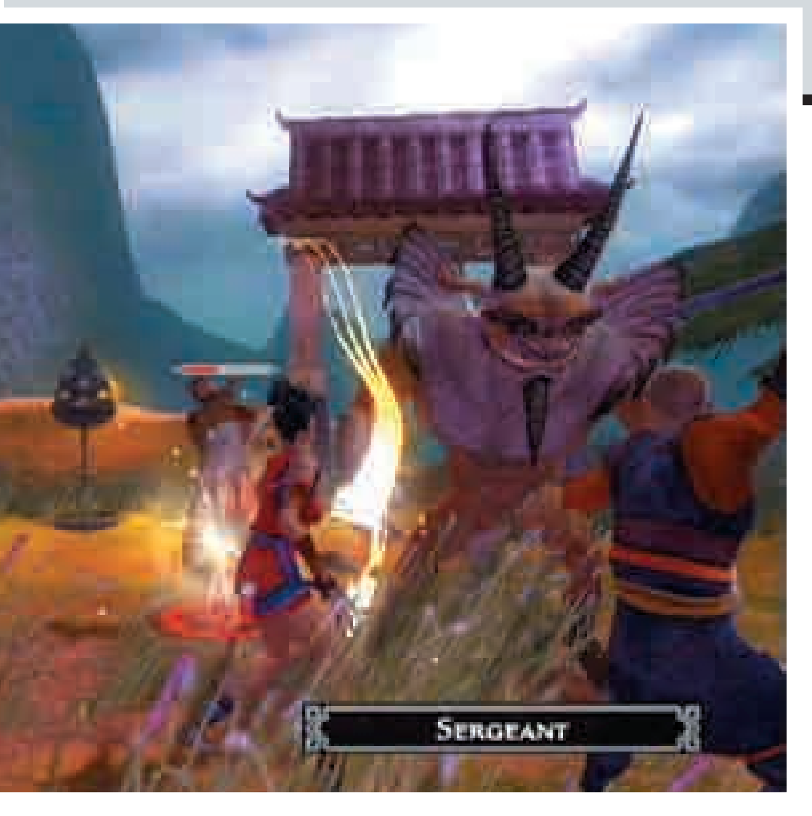


Remember the mantra – power attacks break a blocking stance…





Play nice and you too could earn yourself a beautiful glowing halo to show your nature.





"THE COMBAT SYSTEM IS PRETTY SATISFYING WHEN IT 'CLICKS' AND YOU START KILLING ENEMIES WITH PRECISION RATHER THAN BUTTON BASHING"

and a sedate, atmospheric pace that, for an action-heavy RPG, is remarkably refreshing, and that counts for more than everything else put together.

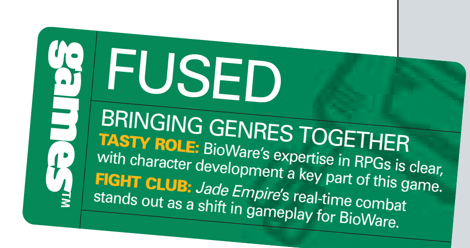
That BioWare has clearly chosen to play on its strengths as an RPG developer ahead of trying to incorporate *Jade Empire*'s Eastern elements is to its credit, not least because it means the game is of a comparable standard to its predecessors. Thankfully, this isn't just on the gameplay front but also when it comes to the visual quality; an area where *Jade Empire* excels, besting anything BioWare has created before. Undoubtedly, much of the game's atmosphere comes from the intricately detailed environments spread throughout the adventure, each of which creates its own unique style without ever deviating from the overall focus of Eastern elegance.

The opening setting of a martial arts school located in relative solitude, the nearby murky swampland, the run-down squalor of a small harbour town, the eerie peace of an ancient graveyard, the majesty of a huge sprawling city… everything is styled exactly as you would expect, which only serves to enhance the authenticity of *Jade Empire*'s approach to the theme. An imaginative musical score also bolsters the game's atmospheric standing, especially since it never strays into the realms of unintentional parody, an area where *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*'s rock-styled Arabian tracks slipped up.

The fact that *Jade Empire* is of a similarly high standard as BioWare's back catalogue doesn't necessarily mean it's comparable in form, however, and although the main adventuring sections may seem more than a little familiar to those with experience of *Knights Of The Old Republic*, the combat most certainly isn't. It's fair to say that BioWare has taken something of a risk by favouring a real-time combat technique as opposed to the successful D&D stylings of *KOTOR* or *Baldur's Gate*, particularly as first impressions suggest the process is overly simplistic in its emulation of some particularly complex fighting styles.

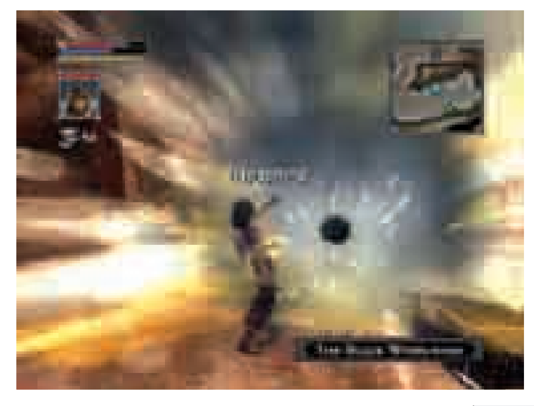
Getting to grips with the combat system – most notably understanding the range of each fighting style and mastering the art of dodging without leaving yourself wide open for another attack – creates an initial feeling of clumsiness that, upon further practice and expansion of the martial arts under your command, isn't actually there. Discovering this is obviously a relief, although the fact that such an inkling is present in the first place leaves us worried that less patient players – especially those hoping for nothing more than *KOTOR* in a kimono – might get frustrated at the change in direction.

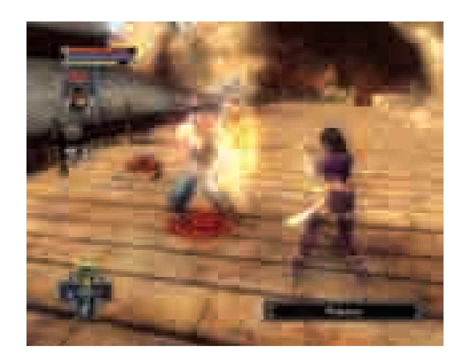
Of course, the fact remains that the combat system is pretty satisfying once it finally 'clicks' and you start eliminating enemies with skilled precision rather than merely button bashing. True, those hoping for a wide range of flowing moves within each of the 30-plus styles on offer may be slightly disappointed – you only get one form of basic, area and power attack per style, with singular strings of flurry combos branching out of each – but the fact that you can switch between styles mid-battle simply by pressing the D-pad gives players the option to sculpt their own methods of destruction for the enemies they encounter. Additionally, the process of enhancing your abilities has enough combinations to allow ▷

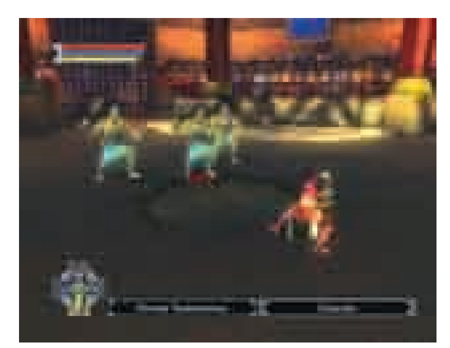


FIST OF FURY, PALM OF PEACE

Many of BioWare's games may offer the freedom to be good or evil, but the concept could have been invented specifically for *Jade Empire*'s philosophical backdrop. As always, performing good or bad deeds (be it through actions or words) changes your standing accordingly, although the results are less physical than in *KOTOR*. Instead, the game changes the experiences you can have; some quests are only available to those of a certain ideology, as are certain actions. Needless to say, being able to kick helpless chihuahuas down the street once you're sufficiently 'evil' is rather more appealing than it probably should be.









for many different experiences; points earned through levelling up allow you to power up certain aspects of each skill, meaning you can focus on the ones that are important to you.

Whether you prefer focus-draining weaponry over less powerful fists, lightning speed over raw physical strength, or magical Chi strikes and the excessive might of Transformation styles over the Harmonic Combos that allow you to reduce an enemy to a puddle of blood, pile of rubble or charred husk, the option is there… although even this has its flaws. In our experience, the right combination of enhancing the Paralysing Palm Support style along with any of the Martial Arts styles left our heroine all but impervious to the attacks of human opposition, as we paralysed and pummelled them into submission.

Admittedly, this is a minor complaint – a trick that, despite reducing the thrill of combat, only spoils things if the player takes advantage of it.

In fact, many of the criticisms that can be levelled at *Jade Empire* are incredibly minor, with most of them being the result of culture shock for those with prior experience of BioWare's portfolio rather than serious flaws. The game's length, for instance, is something that may raise a few eyebrows, despite being in excess of 20 hours for a first play through; it's a significant amount of time for the average gamer, but slightly lacking compared to the epic might of *KOTOR* or *Baldur's Gate*.

That the game is rather more linear than previous efforts is also noticeable, although

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
Probably around 25 hours on the first play, although the structure means you won't be able to do everything in one go.

Q. WHY NOT?
It depends on whether you follow the way of the Open Palm (good) or Closed Fist (evil) – each has its own missions on top of the three unique endings, so you'll have to finish multiple times to see all *Jade Empire* has to offer.

Q. TOO MUCH TEXT?
At times. We're all for in-depth RPGs with tons of personality, but some characters drone on for just a bit too long.

"IF JADE EMPIRE IS THE GAME THAT BIOWARE HAS BEEN WAITING YEARS TO MAKE, THEN THE DEVELOPER SHOULD CONSIDER ITS PATIENCE A VIRTUE – THIS GAME IS AN ASSET TO THE XBOX"



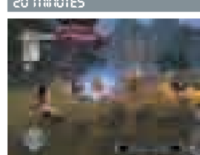
Cannibals – hardly the most dangerous enemy considering their size, but they can cause problems if you happen to face a whole tribe of them at once.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

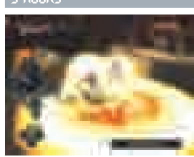
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

20 MINUTES



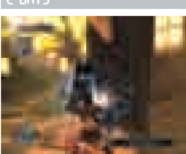
It's all about adjustment to begin with – you'll need to get the hang of the combat in the opening minutes, as well as reading lots and lots of text from your fellow students.

5 HOURS



If you're not a lean, mean fighting machine by now with at least four or five different combat styles under your belt, then you're probably playing the game wrong.

2 DAYS



The Imperial City's huge, so you'll find plenty of things to see and do there before moving on to the Emperor's floating palace. It's all about the side quests, apparently…



Everyone has something to say, though you don't have to listen to them all…

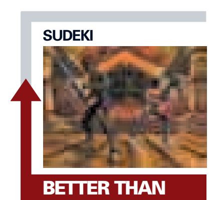


Turn an enemy to stone then deliver the killing blow and smash them to pieces – most satisfying.

again that's not to say that *Jade Empire* drags players through the game on rails, but simply that the game has slightly less scope for revisiting older areas and undertaking side-quests. Whether you see such issues as genuine concerns or not depends on your approach, although those with slightly less jaded minds (pun entirely intended) will see them for the inconsequential quibbles that they are.

If *Jade Empire* is the game that BioWare has been waiting to make for many years, it should consider its patience a virtue – as beautiful and graceful as it is robust and absorbing, *Jade Empire* is an asset to the Xbox. The fact it actually comes to an end is perhaps our biggest regret, although we have no doubt that in *Jade Empire*, BioWare has managed to create a new franchise that will grow to become the cornerstone of the developer's flourishing portfolio. We can only imagine what to expect when the subsequent chapters land on Microsoft's next generation of hardware.

SUDEKI



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



FABLE





VERDICT 8/10

A HUGELY ENGROSSING JEWEL IN BIOWARE'S CROWN

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TO THE EAST: Although the gameplay is Western, BioWare has recreated the Eastern flavour perfectly.

THE MAGIC NUMBER: Three different endings and numerous quests offer plenty of replay value.

REACH FOR THE SKIES

Certainly the weakest element here has to be BioWare's continuing insistence on including sub-games that really don't mesh with the rest of the game. In *Jade Empire*'s case, it comes in the form of a basic vertical shoot-'em-up à la *1942* that really isn't much fun to play, even if you enjoy such games. Obviously, the fact that it's only a mini-game rather than something for dedicated fans of the genre explains why it's not challenging in the slightest, but then that only serves to make us wonder why BioWare bothered to put it in there in the first place. Still, at least you can choose to skip past it if you want – unless you get involved in the Mechanic's side quest, that is…



The Tempest fighting style is only available to those who follow the way of the Closed Fist – it's powerful, but is the price of being evil really worth it?

games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

CAR CLUB: Basically, clans for a racing game. Make friends and take on other teams on Xbox Live.

AUTO (EBAY) TRADER: Buy and sell cars on Live, but does the market have its own economy?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Microsoft Game Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

ITALIAN FOR 'FORCE IT', APPARENTLY

FORZA MOTORSPORT

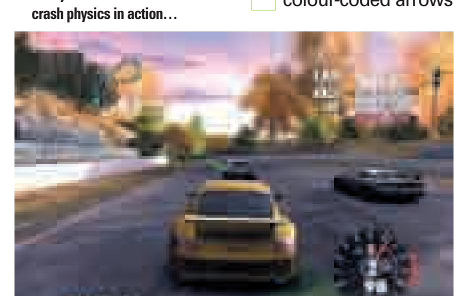
To put it simply, *Forza* is *Gran Turismo* for Xbox. Or at least that's what Microsoft wants it to be. It's a tall order; Polyphony Digital's racer has been long established as the premier console racing simulation and for good reason – it features an almost unbeatable formula of collecting, modifying and racing. How can *Forza* possibly best that? Well, you know what they say: if you can't beat them, you might as well join them…

Forza features somewhere in the region of 200 licensed cars. It has type-specific racing on a mix of real and imagined racecourses. There are trophies and money to be won and cars, races and sponsorship deals to be unlocked. There isn't, as many people will no doubt cheer, a single License Test. And while it does lift many of its features straight from Sony's 30 million-plus selling series, *Forza* brings a few new ideas to the table. The point-to-point racing is evocative of *Burnout 3* and has an illegal street race feel to it that's a bit like *Midnight Club*. This style sits rather uncomfortably with the formalised track racing of the remainder of the game but does at least add some variety.

The beginner level teaching aid (a system of colour-coded arrows placed on the racing line) is intuitive and will ease anyone without experience of the racing simulation into the frame of mind needed to play such a game, yet it does have the effect of making you race against the line rather than the other cars on a track so it's essential for anyone who wants a decent race experience to switch this off. (Right after they disable the game's appalling thrash metal soundtrack, that is.)

Forza boasts a never-before-seen level of car modification and tuning (although *Gran Turismo 4* isn't too far behind), which includes completely changing a car's engine. However, you can only swap engines from cars made by the same manufacturer – so you can put a Ferrari engine in a Fiat but not in a Mini. The ability to modify your cars' exteriors is the one new feature that really stands out; it's not only a logical addition to the genre but is also highly accomplished. Changing parts such as the car's bumpers, hood and rear wing affects it both aesthetically and mechanically and can be as big an influence on performance as changing engine parts. The personalisation aspect of *Forza* (which includes modifying colours or adding vinyls and stickers) shouldn't be underestimated either – much of the game's appeal comes from attachment to one's distinctively customised car, a feeling that simply

■ It's worth veering off into that wall just to see the awesome crash physics in action…







■ Follow the arrows to learn the racing line, but you'll get more cash if you turn the help off.



couldn't be achieved with an off-the-peg model (this is especially good when racing on Xbox Live).

But, as any racing fan will tell you, it's all about how the cars handle on the road, not necessarily how they look, that makes or breaks a racing game. *Forza*'s driving physics are excellent – with the driving aids switched on the game offers something just on the right side of arcade-style racing. In this respect it's closer to *Project Gotham* than *Gran Turismo*; the cars are more responsive and less rigid than those found in Sony's racer – they're also prone to spinning out, making *Forza* a slightly more entertaining ride. Switch those driving aids off and *Forza* becomes much more subtle and a real challenge.

Damage, as it turns out, isn't such a big deal, and after all those years of crying out for it, it seems that it only has the effect of forcing you to restart a race if you ever have a head-on collision with a wall. Which is unlikely. Still, *Forza*'s crash physics are far superior to *Gran Turismo*'s. Which game's handling is best comes down to personal preference. *Gotham* or *Gran Turismo*? Well, now you can add *Forza* to that equation and you'll find as many people to argue one side or another as you would a debate about *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter*.

Because *Forza* uses the *Gran Turismo* formula of 'buy car, tune car, race car, win race, buy car, tune car…' it suffers from many of the same problems; the most obvious of these is that with the ability to tune your car your vehicle can get to the point where it massively outperforms anything else on the track, which can make races less about the racing and more about a time trial. But does *Forza* out-*Gran Turismo Gran Turismo*? Well, no, not quite. Sony's racer just about shades it with its superior presentation, wider racing options, number and variety of cars and a more clearly defined sense of progression. It's a close run thing but if you want the definitive console racing simulation then you'll stick with Polyphony's trusty, if slightly serious, racing opus.

VERDICT 8/10
ACCURATE IF SLIGHTLY BORING GRAN TURISMO CLONE

FAQs

Q. WHICH CAR MANUFACTURERS ARE INCLUDED?
Almost every major one including Ferrari and Porsche. Take that, *Gran Turismo*.

Q. HOW DOES DAMAGE AFFECT RACING?
Any major prangs will force you to restart the race, but you can damage your steering and still finish.

Q. HOW DOES THE SCORING SYSTEM WORK?
Win races, win money – the amount depends on difficulty of the race and how many aids you have switched off.

SEGA GT ONLINE



BETTER THAN

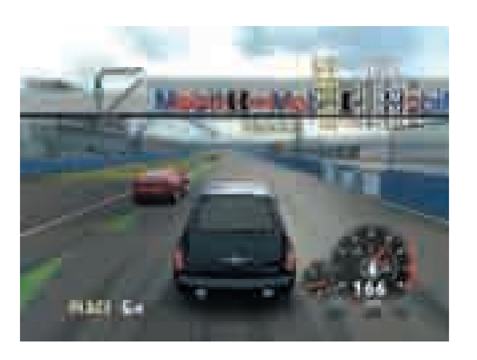
WORSE THAN



GRAN TURISMO 4

THE DRIVATAR OF YOUR LIFE

How do you go about adding a bit of variety to the racing simulation genre? Well, here's one idea: take out the 'player doing the racing' bit. *Forza* has one really intriguing feature – with Drivatar (this is the code that the game's car AI is based on) you can train the CPU to drive how you do. Through a series of tests the computer learns your style – whether you're aggressive or conservative, if you're a Schumacher or a McRae. You can then get the computer to race for you as you watch from the sidelines. It works, although it's hard to gauge exactly how successful it is at mimicking your driving style. Still, for those days when you want to play a game but can't really be bothered it's an essential feature.

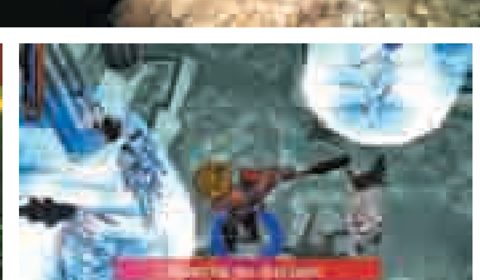








■ There's no denying this is a good looking game, but frustration is a cruel mistress and she's wiped her greasy hands all over this UMD.



■ Shields, clubs, other-worldly beings – it's classic adventuring fare.

BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLAND, MORE LIKE

UNTOLD LEGENDS: BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLADE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1 (2-4 via Wi-Fi)

We should know better, really. While we've learned not to buy into most of the hype that pollutes the industry, we still find ourselves stubbornly buying into the wrong games every now and then. The prospect of a multiplayer *Champions*/*Baldur's Gate* action RPG on a handheld is one that originally saw us knee-deep in drool (we're sad like that), but as the waiter disappears into the kitchen it becomes obvious that this isn't quite what we ordered.

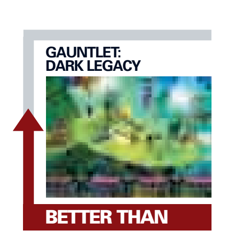
From the get-go, it's clear that *Brotherhood Of The Blade* is not the game we imagined it to be. Perhaps that's a little unfair – more accurately, it *is* that game only it feels a bit like no-one designing the title had actually seen any stats and designs for the PSP. Visuals, while extremely pretty in places, suffer from some very odd stuttering issues, and with slightly fewer buttons on the handheld than a DualShock 2, what keys and triggers there are have been cluttered with controls. Blocking, for example, requires you to hold down the Right Trigger and hit Circle, and the Quick Ability menu is anything but when you're in the heat of battle.

Once you get your head around the controls and get used to the unhealthy loading times (which place a massive strain on battery life), there's actually a fair slice of adventuring to be had. Anyone who's played an action RPG will feel a sense of immediate familiarity here, and although the settings and quests are generally pretty generic the odd highlight will keep you entertained at least until your PSP needs to be charged again. Boss battles in particular stand out, attempting something slightly new in the sea of otherwise staid concepts. But perhaps the biggest letdown is the multiplayer mode, accentuating many of the problems in the single-player quest with some horrible network issues and even more juddering. The sense of teamwork and accomplishment is there, sure, but with such a technical barrier up, it's difficult to will yourself to play it. Shame.

While really quite enjoyable in short measures (annoyances excepted), *Untold Legends* is a massively optimistic game and this is its ultimate downfall – it simply refuses to accept the limitations of the hardware and subsequently suffers in most aspects. A year or two down the line, we expect to see plenty of games like this only without the teething troubles (frequent loading times, instability and some poor control choices), and that fills our hearts with hope. For now, though, it's a case of put up or shut up. A little of each in our case, then.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LOADING NOW: From area change to item screen, there's no escaping those classic loading sessions
JOINED UP: Linking together for four-player battles isn't quite as smooth as it should be…

GAUNTLET: DARK LEGACY



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH




eMag

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
ONLY IT ISN'T: Without dual analogue sticks, *Ape Escape* isn't the same game. This is a valiant attempt to hide the fact but it works as well as the disguise of that monkey who holds twigs in front of his face.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
Sony
DEVELOPER
In-House
PRICE
$39.99
RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)
PLAYERS
1 (2 via Wi-Fi)

ALL TOGETHER NOW – "1, 2, 3, MONKEY!"

APE ESCAPE: ON THE LOOSE

Well, this is an odd one. When sifting through the masses of PSone games that could be converted for the PSP, you'd have thought that even pausing on a game that required heavy use of a pair of analogue sticks would be tantamount to considering making a *Dancing Stage* title with stylus control. Strange, then, that one of the key titles chosen for conversion was the primary vessel used to sell the DualShock controller to the masses. Ah well.

To cut a fairly short story even shorter, what was once a game boasting an ingenious and intuitive control system now teeters on the brink of being horribly broken. But it does work. Just. Without the added accuracy of the second stick, simple tasks such as hitting or catching the cheeky little monkeys are a lot tougher than they should be, and gadgets like the Dash Hoop and RC Car just don't work or feel as they were intended to when the game was designed. You'll learn to overlook these niggles for the most part (especially if you never played *Ape Escape* first time around) but the number of times your net will swing by a monkey's smirking face while he runs off will likely be into three – possibly even four – figures by the end of the game. And you'll never get used to it.

Of course, it wouldn't be a PSP review without some mention of loading times. It's our sad duty to report that *Ape Escape*'s are some of the most crippling and irritating we've seen thus far. This was highlighted when checking a single fact for this review – waiting for a computer to boot up, Internet Explorer to load and then trawling the web for confirmation of a single fact proved

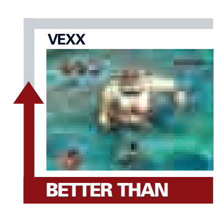


Go on – hit the monkey with the Lightsaber. It's his fault *Episode II* was rubbish, after all…

quicker than actually starting up the game. Extended play potential is seriously damaged by this avalanche of loading screens; if sending simians back to their proper time period with a super-awesome tech net weren't quite so satisfying there'd be nothing stopping you abandoning this in disgust after a couple of levels.

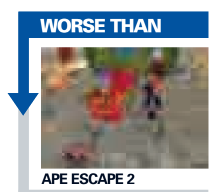
And that's a shame. The core game is as playable and entertaining as any platformer to have been released since the original *Ape Escape*, and despite control issues there's still a whole lot of monkeys to be caught and a whole lot of fun to be had doing it. With its new-found sheen and untouched gameplay, *On The Loose* is a fundamentally great game – it's just a pity it sometimes feels like you're playing it with a busted old third-party controller.

VEXX



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



APE ESCAPE 2



VERDICT 6/10
ILL-CONCEIVED BUT STILL ENTERTAINING



Using the Water Net is nowhere near as tricky as its on-ground counterpart. Figures.



Monkey Table Tennis is the only new element to grace the UMD. Aside from the wonky controls, of course.


eMag


Moving your blob over slopes shows how good the physics are, while also testing your reflexes.



Make the most of the game's tutorials giving you pointers on what to do, because they don't last for very long…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Ignition Entertainment

DEVELOPER
Awesome Studios

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

CAUTION: HIGHLY ADDICTIVE IF SWALLOWED

ARCHER MACLEAN'S MERCURY

It's hard not to feel ripples of concern enter your mind when a developer tells you to your face that in his latest game "the fun doesn't start until world three". Still, when said developer is Archer Maclean (a man grounded in the art of old-school gaming) and the game is *Mercury* (a deceptively simple but oh-so-challenging puzzle game) you can see where the misunderstanding arises. He doesn't mean light, bubbly, excitable fun… he means angry, frustrating fun; the kind that would explain the sly grin on Maclean's face as he watches a cluster of seasoned gamers reduced to gibbering wrecks at the hands of his latest work.

Away from the fraught atmosphere of being scrutinised by the game's creator, you'd expect *Mercury* to be slightly less tense than it first appears. But it isn't. Rather than becoming a clever little puzzler that manages to drain your time without you realising it (which is essentially what it is), *Mercury* is a stern mistress – one that has you unconsciously poking your tongue out in concentration while you play, then cursing as you fail for the umpteenth time on a level that couldn't look more straightforward if it tried.

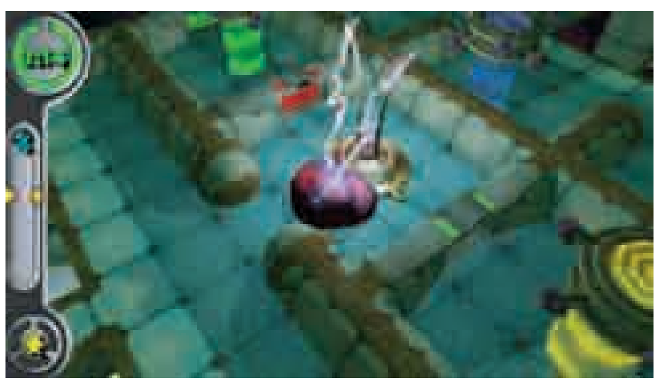
But then, seeing as *Mercury* isn't so much a *Tetris*-style 'see how well you can do' puzzler as it is akin to something more cerebral and freeform like *Lemmings* or *Spindizzy*, that's exactly the point. Many of the initial 72 levels look simple enough, but completing them with the relevant criteria (be it time remaining, achieving certain goals, retaining a set amount of your mercury blob to the end or a mixture of all three) requires more than a fair share of careful balance and skill. And even if you do reach the end, there's usually room for improvement, especially since the game's level design allows for numerous 'cheats' that can shave seconds off your time, while the score system rewards those good enough to best the developers' scores with some truly fiendish hidden levels.

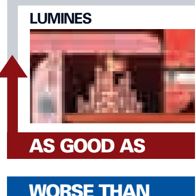
Naturally, the lack of the promised tilt functionality for the US release is slightly disappointing (blame Sony's lack of planning for official PSP peripherals, if you have to point the finger) but that doesn't stop the game being highly playable and addictive in its tilt-free form. *Mercury*'s subtle combination of spot-on physics, obvious answers and hidden short cuts creates a game of continual perfection and frustration alike – what more could you ask for from a great puzzle game?

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
NEWTON'S LAW: *Mercury* throws around complex physics without even breaking a sweat.
SO ANGRY: If the PSP wasn't so fragile we'd have thrown it on the floor because of *Mercury*'s difficulty.



VERDICT 8/10
THE LEMMINGS OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM


Try not to get struck by lightning – you'll lose some of your precious mercury. And that's a bad thing.

LUMINES

AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN

METEOS


eMag

JUICED

MORE THAN JUST A LITTLE SQUIRT

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Juice Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-8

Street racing is, without a doubt, the games industry's darling genre at the moment, and everything with a stupid number of mod options and a lashing of street talk seems to turn to gold. The main problem is that the majority of street racers are all mouth and no trousers, making them contemptuous in the eyes of serious gamers. Thankfully, *Juiced* is a little different…

The game has a chequered history that the world and his wife must be aware of by now, but this is insignificant now that the finished product is sat on shop shelves waiting to be snapped up. Even gamers who bought and managed to enjoy *Need for Speed Underground* should be thinking of parting with some cash for this gem of a driver, largely because *Juiced* has its priorities right. Sure, there are enough modding, colouring and personalising opportunities to keep car-nuts busy for a lifetime but, more importantly, there's a solid racing engine underneath it all.

The handling is arcade-like without being too insulting, and the sense of speed is second only to *Burnout 3*. The learning curve is excellently balanced, starting off reasonably tough and maintaining the challenge all the way to the top, whereas acquiring cash to spend on fresh vehicles is relatively simple. In fact, everything about *Juiced* amounts to a measured take on the genre, from the alarmingly comprehensible 'street talk' all the way through to the neat little touches such as the ability to earn cash by betting on races, or allowing a member of your crew to race in your place.

The only real problem with *Juiced* is that it can become a little repetitive as the game progresses, and even though new vehicles are being constantly unlocked, they feel insubstantial next to those on offer in more mature racers such as *Forza* and *Project Gotham Racing 2*. Sadly, there are many aspects of *Juiced* that lag behind Microsoft's racers, *Forza* in particular, as many of *Juiced*'s key features have been refined and bettered elsewhere. However, in relation to the more arcade-based titles available at the moment this game is the leader of the pack, as it manages to deliver everything that makes street racing enjoyable at a high standard, in one neat package.

This perhaps isn't the first-choice racer for 2005, but it's undoubtedly an interesting prospect for any petrol-head looking to expand their collection with quality rather than endlessly updated quantity.

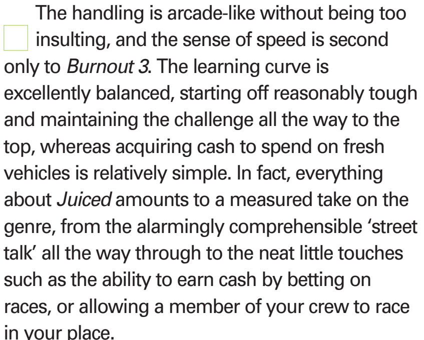


VERDICT 7/10
SOLID, BUT BY NO MEANS SPECIAL.



Slam on the nitrous and watch as the screen blurs in some sort of toadying homage to *Burnout 3*.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
RACE ME: *Juiced* has the usual eight-player online showdowns, where pimped rides can be raced.
PLAY FOR KEEPS: You can race in online pink-slip races where you lose your car if you lose the race.



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN
FORZA MOTORSPORT

PS2 £39.99

This game stands next to *Burnout 3* as one of the finest racers on the PS2. The frame rate is solid, loading times are bearable and the sense of speed is identical to that of the Xbox version. Definitely more essential on this format; PS2 owners are advised to seek out a copy.



Perhaps with a pink car, other racers will be more willing to race for pink slips, although this is unlikely.



SWAT 4

THE SWAT TEAM IS BACK, READY TO BUST YOUR ASS ALL THE WAY BACK DOWN TO TRAFFIC COP

DETAILS





FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Vivendi

DEVELOPER
Irrational Games

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-10

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium III,128Mb RAM, 64Mb graphics card, 2Gb HDD space

God knows why it took Vivendi so long to release another first-person shooter-style *SWAT* game. *SWAT 3* shifted the focus of the franchise from strategy to strategic shooter and did so with considerable aplomb – but we've been waiting for the follow-up for far too long. However, the time for grumbling is over, as *SWAT 4* proves itself to be well worth the wait.

A squad-based FPS, *SWAT 4* sees the player taking charge of four NPC members of a SWAT team. You'll then undertake a series of missions where success depends on using the whole team to flush out enemies rather than merely running in and gunning down everything in sight. The twist is that the team needs to operate within the parameters of the police force – which means shooting the enemy is only available as a last resort. Wherever possible, it's preferable to subdue and restrain your opponents using flashbangs, CS gas, pepper spray, even waving a gun in an enemy's face and screaming at them to surrender.

It might not sound like much of a change from the normal squad-based shooter dynamic, but this attempt to arrest rather than kill is what makes *SWAT 4* such unpredictable fun. Enemies will react depending on their morale – whether they have been shot at or wounded, how many police officers are bearing down upon them and so on. The result is that no terrorist ever does the same thing twice, and every hostage situation has that air of unpredictability; will the target surrender meekly, or fire a volley of shots at his would-be captors? This random element really adds to the replay value of *SWAT 4*, as people are rarely in the same room twice, so the same mission can unfold in a variety of ways.



You can't beat a bit of self-referential humour. *Urban Justice* was never released, until now…

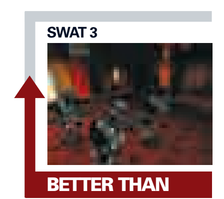
Visually the game is solid if unspectacular, with its generally decent graphics only occasionally let down by clipping problems as arms and guns pass through doors and walls, betraying enemy positions. The sound is better, with clever effects adding to the claustrophobic nature of the gameplay (and the voice acting is unusually quite good to boot). Ordering team-mates around is easier than ever thanks to a system based on the graphical interface, where quick commands can be issued using the space bar (holding the right mouse offers a menu with greater choice) and multiplayer is pleasing, although the nature of the game lends itself far better to co-operative missions than deathmatches.

A true 'thinking man's shooter', then, and one that can be enjoyed by all those capable of engaging their brain before pulling the trigger. Fast and furious it most certainly isn't, but *SWAT 4* remains one of the more enjoyable titles of the year thus far.



AN EXCELLENT ADDITION TO THE SWAT FRANCHISE

SWAT 3

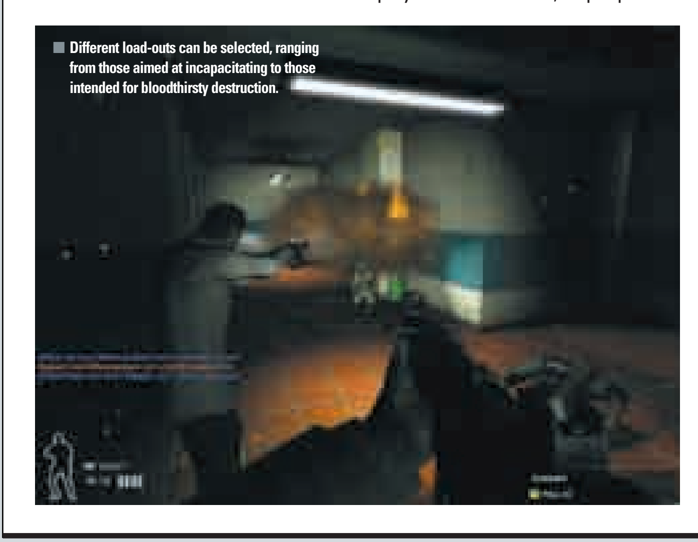


BETTER THAN

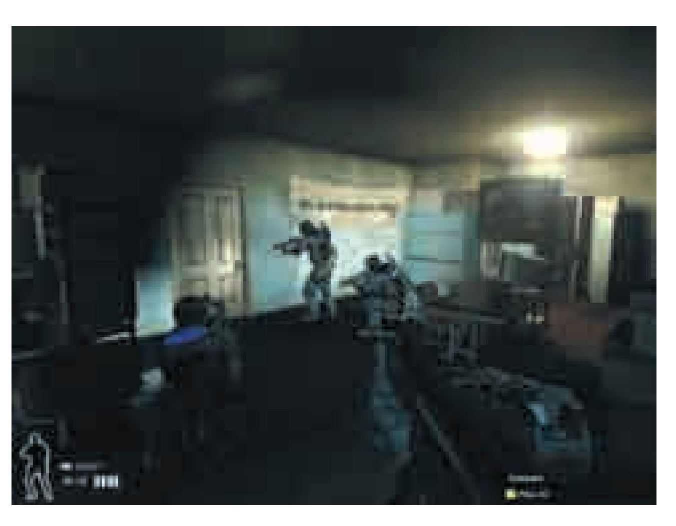
WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX 3

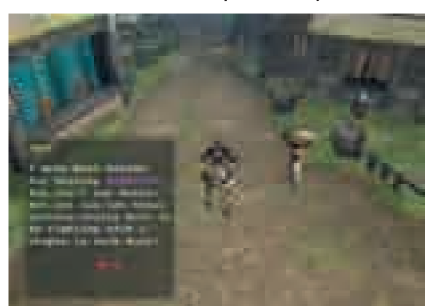


Different load-outs can be selected, ranging from those aimed at incapacitating to those intended for bloodthirsty destruction.





The better your weapons, the bigger the creature you'll be able to tackle. But take some friends with you to make the job easier.

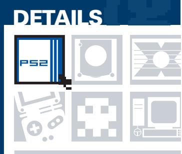




MONSTER HUNTER

THE ONLINE SCALES TIP IN SONY AND CAPCOM'S FAVOUR

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
27 May

PLAYERS
1 (1-4 online)

As the likes of *Halo 2, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* have proved beyond all doubt, playing with friends can often be just as enjoyable as playing against them. But with a little more effort, co-operative play can be taken that step further – the concept of 'tanking' (sending in a tough character to hold an enemy in place while others attack from range) is one any MMO player will vouch for but that's just the beginning of an all-new tactical arsenal.

You see, Capcom is letting you set traps, create distractions and formulate hundreds of useful items and weapons in your quest to hunt – as the name of the game suggests – increasingly large monsters. If you were to judge a game purely by its interface and controls, you'd probably have stopped looking at *Monster Hunter* already. Luckily for Capcom, that's a silly thing to do. While there certainly are problems with it, there's plenty to say in praise of the game and it's will to try something a little different.

Single player, though compelling at first, soon begins to repeat itself – you'll need to redo a lot of missions in each 'level' to build up your equipment to a stage where the next set of tasks is even remotely possible. Yet while the larger monsters can be a nightmare to slay single-handedly, the sense of accomplishment if you do manage it makes the hours of frustration almost worthwhile. And if you've got your PS2 up and running online the game opens up like you wouldn't believe. The number of strategies available to a quartet of hunters is almost immeasurable, especially as each species has its own characteristics, weak points and likes/hates – coax one out with a slab of tainted meat or stun one with a noise or smell it can't stand. Or simply run at it and hack it to bits. Chances are, though, it'll be you that ends up in pieces if your plan's that weak…

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
HUNT AWAY: Going online and hunting with up to three other adventurers isn't just great fun, it's also the only way to get at some of the game's best items. Now there's an incentive for you.

Monster Hunter is without question the PS2's finest exclusive online title. The scope and scale make it like nothing else we've played on a console, and while the solo trudge can grate due to the lack of character progression (forget levelling up – stats are determined solely by equipment), the thrill of the hunt is heightened during online play, even without voice chat support to keep your posse in check. So dust off that Network Adaptor, sharpen your Bone Lance and pounce on this rare excuse to take your PS2 online before it gets away.

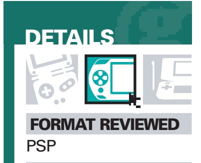


A REAL COUP FOR PS2 ONLINE




eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$39.95

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

TURN-BASED ACTION, CARD COLLECTING… WHAT ON EARTH IS KONAMI UP TO?

METAL GEAR AC!D

Though we've had *Metal Gear Ac!d* since its Japanese release, we wanted to better understand its storyline before reviewing it. As it turns out, there was no point, as Snake's latest be-mulletted adventure is typical of the series as a whole – a few decent points littered with the sort of throwaway lines and nonsensical plot twists that could keep a comic-book factory in business for an eternity.

Of course, what everyone really wants to know is whether the novel combination of strategy, stealth and card-based action actually works within the *Metal Gear* universe. The answer is yes, yes it does – but not without problems… While the card and strategy elements work surprisingly well, they don't really fit the stealth side of the game for which the series is so highly regarded. It's still possible to lure guards away from their posts in a variety of ways, but when you're only given a set amount of turns in which to do so, frustration can mount and you'll inevitably make a few mistakes.

The camera can also prove to be a nuisance, and while it can be rotated and employs a handy overhead view, you'll still find yourself sporadically triggering the odd alarm because of a previously unseen guard. Sure, many of *Ac!d*'s problems can be circumvented with a little card manipulation and a 'slowly but surely' approach, but its occasional reliance on hindsight to negotiate certain levels does prove irksome. Luckily, it's not all bad news as new character Teliko works a lot better than Raiden ever did – it's just seems a wasted opportunity that Konami didn't implement any sort of co-op feature.

Problems aside, *Metal Gear Ac!d* remains an enjoyable experience, and while it's not a true *Metal Gear* title per se it still manages to pay plenty of lip service to Kojima's PlayStation trilogy. Using Nikita missiles to take out electrified floors, hiding in cardboard boxes to avoid guards, and Snake's wise-ass cracks are all present and correct – it's just a shame that the new play mechanics can't always contain them very well. The familiarity also extends to the game's aesthetics, which include plenty of typical *MGS* traits. From the abrupt bark of a firing FAMAS to the impressive cut-scenes of *Metal Gear Solid 3*, *Ac!d*'s visuals and effects are perfectly adequate.

While *Metal Gear Ac!d* isn't perfect, it's far from the mess that we initially feared and presents a refreshing alternative for anyone looking for a decent challenge.



games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

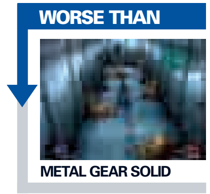
TWO'S COMPANY: A new addition to the American version of the game is a two-player head-to-head battle that wasn't ready in time for the Japanese launch. Good fun it is too…

METAL GEAR: SNAKE'S REVENGE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



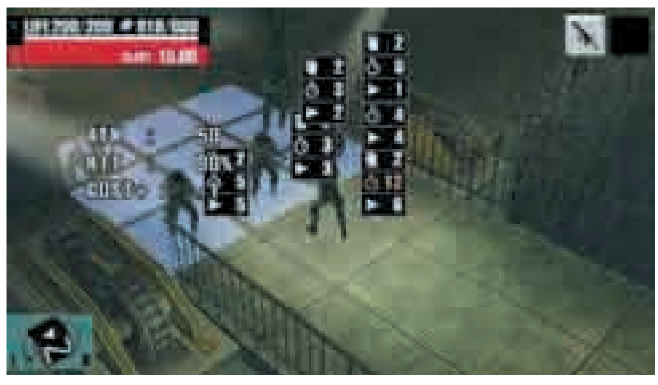
METAL GEAR SOLID

VERDICT 6/10

A BRAVE EXPANSION OF THIS BELOVED FRANCHISE



Some enemies are quick to raise the alarm, so make sure you take them out as quickly and quietly as possible.



Handy icons instantly tell you when it's your turn to move and what items are equipped.



Hideous rock guitar wails, an unnecessarily dramatic introduction… you'd almost think that Bruce Springsteen was on his way.


The odd useable item aside, *SpikeOut*'s environments are completely non-interactive – hardly what you'd expect from the Xbox.



Kill a boss and all the remaining enemies will run for their lives. And then keep running, even when they reach an obstacle. Shameful.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4



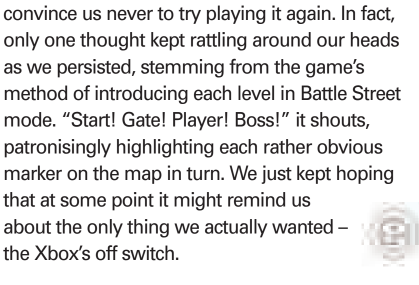
SPIKEOUT: BATTLE STREET

AT LEAST IT'S BETTER THAN DEATH BY DEGREES

Those of you who read our review of *Tekken 5* a few months ago might recall the vitriol we expressed over Devil Within, one of the game's many sub-modes. Overly repetitive gameplay, a complete lack of moves for you to perform, the same four enemies attacking you again and again… if it wasn't for the fact that it was only a very small part of the overall package, we'd have been rather more upset. And indeed, we are when it comes to *SpikeOut: Battle Street*, if only because it appears that Sega has taken all the bad ideas from Devil Within and tried to make an entire game out of them.

Of course, you might think that, theoretically, *SpikeOut: BS* (a fitting abbreviation if ever there was one) should be right up our street – not just for its arcade heritage but also because of the whole '*Streets Of Rage* in 3D' angle. If only that were true. Instead, what *SpikeOut: BS* actually consists of has us wondering why it's taken so long for Sega to release it, not to mention why it bothered. The AI is incompetent (it can't even seem to run around obstacles), the controls are clumsy (if using weapons is so important, why do you have to press three buttons simultaneously just to pick one up?), the environments are flat and non-interactive, the character animation is laughable, the split-screen multiplayer just makes things confusing (why the separate time limits instead of a group one?)… the list goes on. That the game doesn't even manage to look as good as its eight-year-old arcade cousin is the most damning thing of all, particularly since the likes of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Prince Of Perisa: Warrior Within* have shown just how nice 3D environments can look on the Xbox.

Theoretically, massed brawls should be all the fun. This game proves they're not.



We so wanted to like *SpikeOut*, we really did, but less than a day of enduring what the game had to 'offer' and having so many flaws thrown in our faces was more than enough to convince us never to try playing it again. In fact, only one thought kept rattling around our heads as we persisted, stemming from the game's method of introducing each level in Battle Street mode. "Start! Gate! Player! Boss!" it shouts, patronisingly highlighting each rather obvious marker on the map in turn. We just kept hoping that at some point it might remind us about the only thing we actually wanted – the Xbox's off switch.

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

FRIENDLY FIRE: Having four people on one Xbox sounds fun, but the split-screen presentation ruins it.

LIVE AID: Things get slightly better online, but even that can't fill the holes in the lacklustre gameplay.



VERDICT 3/10

A WAFER-THIN IDEA STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT





DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Inevitable Entertainment

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

AREA 51

LIFE IS NEVER BLACK AND WHITE – IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GREYS

Whether or not the conspiracy theorists are right, when it comes to games aliens *do* exist, though they appear purely to serve as fodder for hordes of angry, pad-wielding players eager to take on the role of defender of the planet. Well, now Midway has taken the fight straight to the heartland of UFO theories, but by the looks of things fantasy is more appealing than reality…

It may be the government research facility for extra-terrestrial technology, but there's a certain blandness to Inevitable's Area 51, with murky environments and dull-coloured corridors making up the majority of the game's playable areas. When placed next to giants such as *Doom 3* or *The Chronicles of Riddick*, it becomes obvious that in terms of visuals this game isn't looking to be at the forefront of the genre.

Perhaps the team felt that they could rely on the massively derivative gameplay to make *Area 51* appeal to console owners already spoilt for choice when it comes to first-person shooters. Well, if there's a more average and unoriginal 3D blaster this year, some sort of collective hat-eating may be in order. The stereotyped formula of 'walk along corridor, shoot bad guy, turn corner, shoot another bad guy' has been applied to almost every aspect of the game. There are even on-rails shooting sections to add to the mediocrity.

The sounds are probably where the game will gain the most kudos, as the superbly narrated plot is a credit to the *Area 51* experience. David Duchovny's soothing monotone has never been more suited to a videogame, and the *X-Files* connection really is the icing on the cake. In fact, fans of the pioneering sci-fi series may well find something that floats their boats when it comes to the game's twisting narrative. The plot tension and various mission objectives always seem to be building towards a visceral, explosive fight for survival, but sadly the gameplay severely hampers the chance of this actually happening.

There are moments when player adrenaline levels will rise above the base level, but they are so few and far between that in the end most will decide that slogging through the copious average sections simply isn't worth the effort. There is the option of co-operative split-screen, which is always a welcome bonus, but it still manages to add little to this painfully middle-of-the-road game.



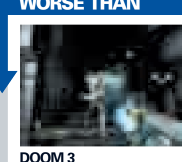
VERDICT 5/10
AVERAGE TO THE CORE

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND



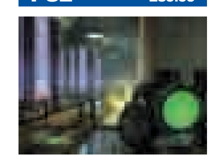
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DOOM 3

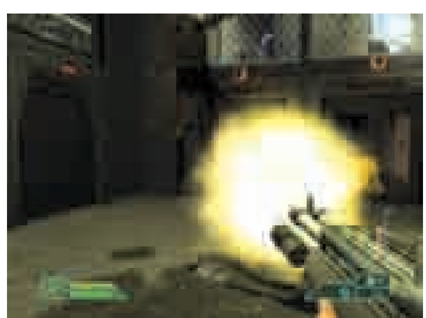
PS2 £39.99



A more appealing prospect for a console devoid of first-class first-person shooters, *Area 51* should be considered as a possible purchase for owners of Sony's machine. Still, rental is probably still the best option here…



Leaning around corners, dual wielding, melee attacks and sniper sections – it's all been done better elsewhere.

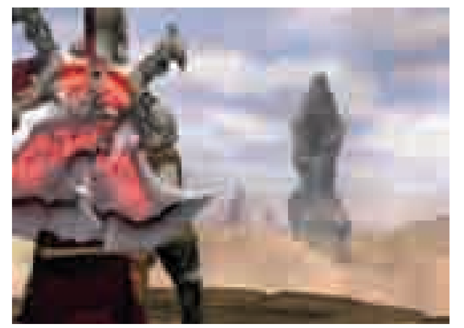


When the ammo's gone, use the butt of your gun – as in every other FPS.

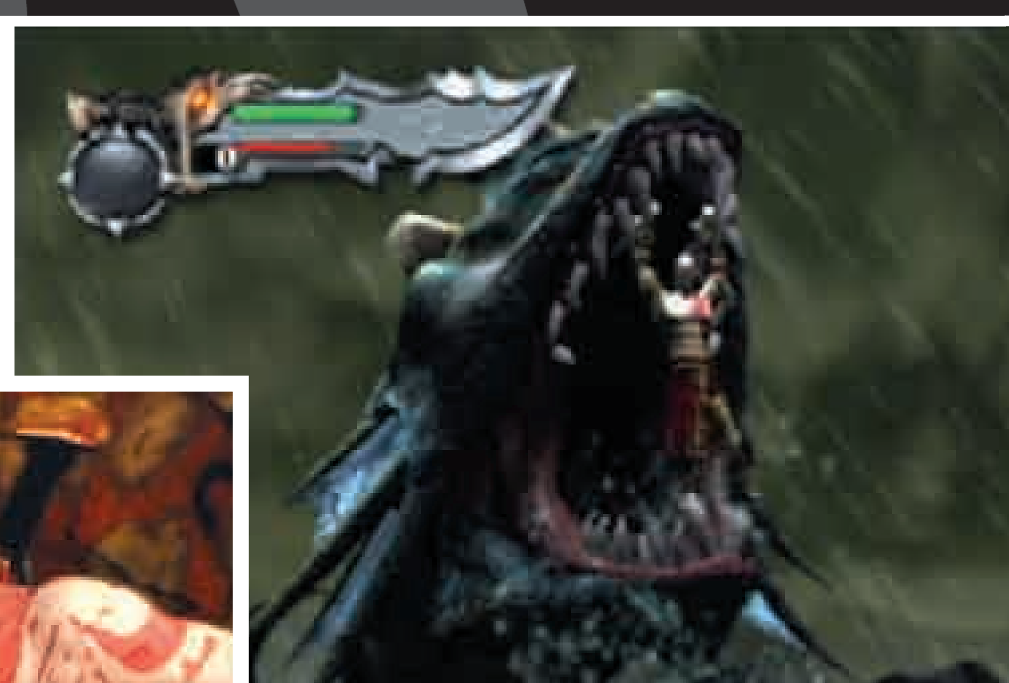


This alien fellow is butchering all your buddies, so why not plough some bullets into his face?


eMag



The game's scale is breathtaking; Kratos will have to get up that mountain.



games™

FINGERPRINT

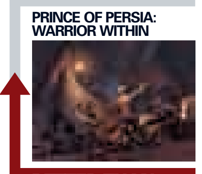
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

HIT OR MYTH: A grounding in Greek lore makes *God Of War* less try-hard than Dante's escapades.

SEX AND VIOLENCE: Pulling no punches, there's a red sea of vino on display. And a fair few nipples.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN



BETTER THAN

A LOT LIKE



CLASH OF THE TITANS

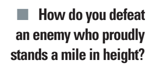
THE SHARPEST BLADE IN SONY'S GAMING ARSENAL

GOD OF WAR

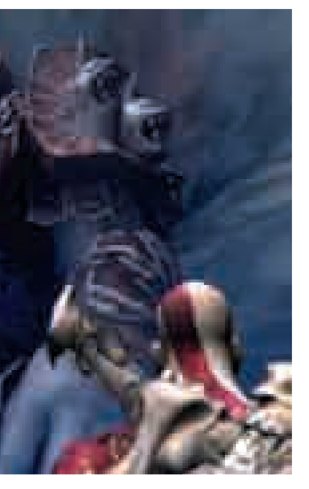




■ The Hydra is one of the first challenges to overcome. Naturally, there are three heads to kill.



■ How do you defeat an enemy who proudly stands a mile in height?

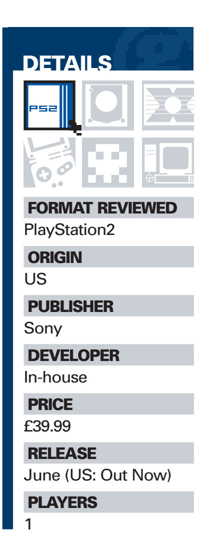


What with the development of the PS3 and the launch of the PSP, Sony hasn't found the time to release many quality first-party PS2 games lately. During the last decade, titles such as *Ico* have shown us that the founding fathers of PlayStation are quite capable of producing the goods, but the company's recent concentration on EyeToy- and microphone-led products has caused some to worry that it was neglecting its duty to bring out the best in its elderly console. Well, worry no more, because *God Of War* is not only one of Sony's best in-house games in months, it's also one of the most accomplished PS2 titles yet to see the light of day. It's unbelievable that until recently *God Of War* had no scheduled release on these fair shores. With pitiful efforts like *The Getaway: Black Monday* ruining our working day during the last year, the reality of such a triumphant, assured action game being kept solely for American gamers is almost criminal. That such a sleeper title could have escaped the attention of the world until now, when so much detritus gets a heavily marketed release, is beyond our comprehension.

Taking its cues (liberally) from the legends of ancient Greece, *God Of War* is a title that has never lost sight of what it hopes to achieve. Even ignoring the mile-tall enemies and viciously straightforward puzzles contained within, it still stands as a proud monument to the possibilities of imaginative game design and thorough planning. However, as well as looking to innovate, Sony's title also captures the uncomplicated feel of old-school platform bashers, knowing exactly when a gamer would rather think in four directions than dozens, where simplicity is far more suitable than contrived, incongruous degrees of choice. If Capcom found the juiciest vein of unadulterated gaming with *Resident Evil 4*, then surely *God Of War* hacks at that vein and drinks it dry. And this from the studio that brought you *Twisted Metal: Black*.

For the soundbite-friendly, *God Of War* is *Prince Of Persia*-meets-*Devil May Cry* at a mythology lecture, though neither of these gaming influences come close to matching the scale of SCEA's brutal romp, let alone the level of violence. Once a servant of Ares, God of War, warrior Kratos is tricked into murdering his own wife and child, and with the aid of the remaining gods vows to take revenge by killing his former master. So begins a quest that takes in such tourist hot spots as ancient Athens, The Desert of Lost Souls, Pandora's Castle (located on a huge mountain ▷

"FOR THE SOUNDBITE-FRIENDLY, GOD OF WAR IS PRINCE OF PERSIA-MEETS-DEVIL MAY CRY AT A MYTHOLOGY LECTURE"



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
June (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1



games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

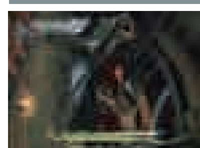
JUMPY: Platforming, beam-balancing and rope-swinging all sit well with the fluid combat system.

WHAT THE HELL?: Some of the most well-plotted puzzles we've seen in an action title in years.

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

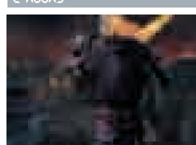
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

20 MINS



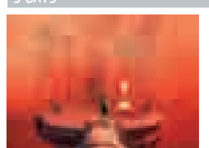
The Hydra. Or, at least, one of its three heads. Meet a huge boss like this during the first level and you know you're playing a game worthy of the 'epic' tag.

2 HOURS



It's Ares, God of war himself. He's a big bugger too. It's around this point the quest begins to feel beyond the realms of a mere mortal, no matter how much brutality you display.

3 DAYS

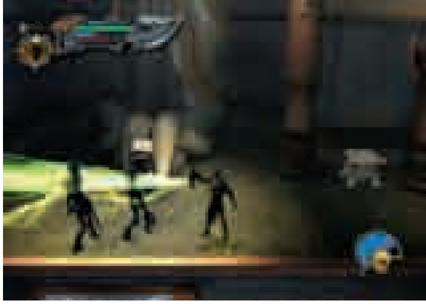


We died and went to the Underworld. Screaming souls fall from the sky into the River Styx below. One misstep, and our hero will find himself dismissed for a red hot early bath.

"A MASTERFUL GAME THAT GETS THE VERY MOST FROM THE PLAYSTATION2 HARDWARE, GOD OF WAR IS A TITLE TO BE MISSED AT YOUR PERIL"

GOD MODES

***God Of War*'s action might seem slightly one-note without the magic abilities handed down to you by the deities of Olympus. The four powers – freezing, lightning and two smart-bomb-esque screen-fillers – aren't remarkable in themselves, but things get more interesting when you realise the 'freeze' function is activated by holding Medusa's severed head out for your enemies to behold. Combined with your ability to upgrade magic and weapons based on which you use most – and the small number of uses for each that can be squeezed from the magic bar – *God Of War* is a constant process of prioritising in order to survive.**



Medusa's head is an excellent defence. No blood-scorpions, though.

chained to a Titan's back) and Hades' Underworld itself. But that's not to say *God Of War* will appeal solely to mythology freaks. Anyone who has seen Harryhausen's *Clash Of The Titans* will be in familiar territory here; enemies such as the Hydra, a giant Minotaur, and Medusa, the fabled, snake-haired queen of the Gorgons, all make an appearance, and all are dwarfed by Ares himself, who strides through Athens crushing thousands of arrow-flinging troops beneath his sandalled feet.

Of course, scale is nothing without gameplay, and the weapon-wielding aspects of *God Of War* more than stand up on their own merits. Kratos' primary weapon – a set of dual blades fused to the hero's wrists with molten metal chains – flow as well as any action engine yet devised, with one fluid movement seamlessly stretching into the next. There are hundreds of context-specific moves to be learned and pulled off in the heat of battle too, bolstered by an easily mastered parry system that deflects most enemy attacks and slows the action down momentarily so Kratos might deliver a well-timed coup de grace. Other moves, as with Dante's own misadventures, propel enemies skyward and enable them to be juggled with a mighty combo of speedy exchanges, while using the various finishing moves encourages moment-to-moment snap decisions by altering the type and volume of essential collectables awarded with each kill.

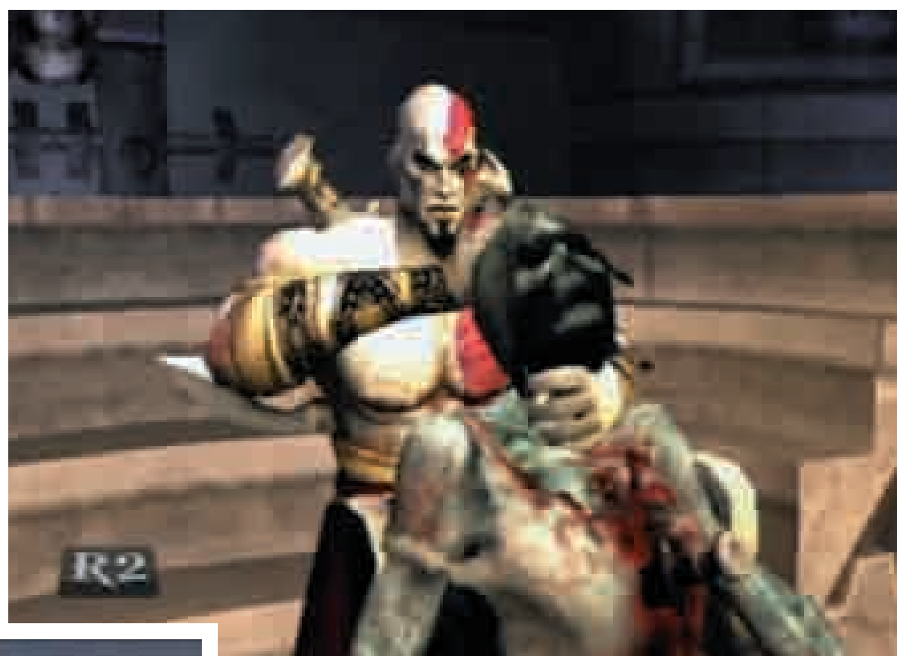
And while many other titles (and again, we're thinking of a certain blond nancy boy) promote the avid gathering of coloured orbs, few cause the level of uncertainty as to which powers are best strengthened for the coming onslaught as that elicited by *God Of War*. In this sense, players are encouraged to explore the environment for the most positive of reasons rather than for the sake of proud completion value; the upgrades, as well as strengthening the power of each magic ability or weapon at hand, unlock enough new moves to force further mastery of each instrument of bloodletting. In short, upgrading is necessary throughout *God Of War*, and though there is no wrong turn in terms of boosting these abilities, the style of customisation adopted by each player has a direct effect on the manner in which they approach each battle.

However, Sony's title is rarely content with providing finger-hurting tapathon battles without the inclusion of some of fiendish puzzles. These tasks, which punctuate the action at regular intervals, are often far simpler to solve than they first appear (though we'd attest that such is the signature of a great gaming puzzle), and sometimes tough enough to set your overall quest back by up to half an hour of frustration. It's here that perhaps the developer shows the greatest understanding of drama (in the classical, Greek sense, of course), and perfectly places these peaks and troughs of silent pause to interrupt the wails of bloody, cinematic action.

Nor does the game's design favour a certain style of puzzle: giant blocks must be twisted and stacked in three dimensions; secret pathways

KILLED WITH ONE FINGER

Though many enemies in *God Of War* can simply be hacked at until they dissolve into a puddle of shadow, most bad guys you meet have a character-specific finishing move, which will activate when they are a few blows away from death. Here, pressing the grab button will cause Kratos to finish his foe by the most brutal of means, with smashing a siren's head repeatedly into the floor standing as a highlight. However, stronger enemies require more than a single button press, with a series of keystrokes and analogue waggles needed to send them to the Underworld. Defeating Medusa, for example, requires the player to twist the pad while Kratos twists at her head, before eventually popping it clean from her torso. And that, in essence, is why we play games…





■ If this looks formidable, wait until you reach the Underworld. All the enemies constantly exude fire there.



■ You'll need more than a tin of Chappie to distract Cerberus from your imminent demise.

must be sought based on the flimsiest of clues; pillars must be dragged and kicked across vast open spaces to the most exact of positions. Indeed, such is the immensity of some of the largest puzzles that the player's response to a possible solution is often, 'that can't be it – the game can't be that good,' but repeatedly those initial, instinctive responses – informed by a gaming shorthand learned by playing through many weaker puzzles in inferior games – proves entirely correct. It's a proud moment for gaming in general as well as for the player, and one of the reasons that *God Of War* makes you glad other people are sitting in the room to observe the game's progression.

Just as surprising, though, is the level of weight everything in *God Of War*'s universe displays. In a world built from stone and wood, every one of Kratos' actions seems like a Herculean challenge, from the slightest swipe of the blade to the weariest pull of a rusted lever. Combined with the simply stunning cut-scenes, which would sit comfortably in the pantheon of the finest movies scattered throughout a videogame, Sony leaves the gamer lost in one of the most immersive, reality-grounded worlds we can remember. And that's taking into account the level of otherworldly hokum on display.

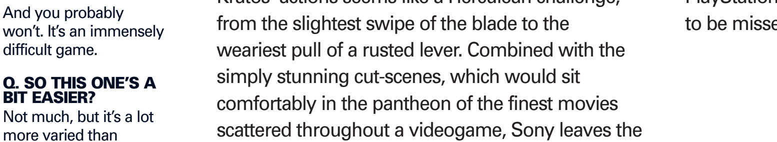
In truth, there's little holding *God Of War* back from perfection: a little too much screen tagging here and there when the game-controlled camera shifts; the slightest hint of a developer limited by the technological abilities of its chosen format (particularly when enemies are forced to respawn rather than march onscreen as a formidable army to begin with); perhaps a few too many instant death scenarios. Otherwise, it's an unmitigated joy to play from start to finish, not only offering enough unlockable features to encourage replay, but worthwhile, truly fascinating insights into its development at that. A masterful game that gets the very most from the PlayStation2 hardware, *God Of War* is a title to be missed at your peril.

FAQs

Q. ANOTHER HACK-AND-SLASH PLATFORMER?
Yes, but don't doze off yet. It's actually a superb blend of action, thought and awe-inspiring grandeur.

Q. BUT I HAVEN'T FINISHED DEVIL MAY CRY 3 YET.
And you probably won't. It's an immensely difficult game.

Q. SO THIS ONE'S A BIT EASIER?
Not much, but it's a lot more varied than Capcom's button-basher.





VERDICT 9/10
AN OLYMPIAN FIRST-PARTY TITLE FROM SONY


1P
PUSH 1 BUTTON
REGAIN POWER
PUSH 2 BUTTON
BUY-IN
GET UP!
WORLD WRE
TIME 21:48



Last one over the top rope turns out the light **WWF Wrestlefest – Arcade [Technos] 1991**


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.32 JUNE 2005
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
SUPER RESTORE
Archer Maclean reveals his arcade rejuvenation secrets
VIC-20
WE FIND OUT WHY THE VIC WAS VICTORIOUS
We pay homage to Psycho Mantis – possibly the greatest game boss ever
REVIEWED
Sega's Classics Collection
RENEGADE
Which 8-bit version will win Clash Of The Titans?
IK+
Why the three-way fighter is a true gaming classic
Want to play NES games on the move? The Blaze Pocket Fami lets you go old-school on the go...
PLUS
RETRO NEWS,
BUYER'S GUIDE,
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ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
WORST LICENCE EVER,
AND MUCH MORE…
OLIVER FREY

Retro News

N·E·W·S· R·E·T·R·O

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

There comes a time when you have to prioritise. In this case, the imminent arrival of Baby Jones #2 has meant finding funds and clearing space. With a heavy heart I started clearing out all my unplayed games and headed off to Gamestation with a very large suitcase. One credit note later (I'll probably buy everything again in a few months) and it was time to consider the ultimate sacrifice – selling my Japanese 'This is Cool' Saturn.

Blowing a thin layer of dust from its gorgeous see-through shell, I contemplated finally ridding myself of it forever – before that, though, it was time for one last play. After selecting a few choice shmups (I'd sold the rest of my collection a long time ago) I stabbed the power button and awoke my Saturn from its two-month slumber. Three hours of playing *Radiant Silvergun*, *Soukyugurentai*, *Battle Garegga* and *Sexy Parodius* was enough to convince me that the Saturn wouldn't be going anywhere.

Still, the rest of my collection is now long gone and it would appear that for me at least, collecting will be nothing more than a distant memory. I'll just have to covet each month's ultimate collection instead – thank goodness this issue's is a real corker…



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

Down, but not out

CGE UK RETURNS, BUT NOT WITHOUT A FEW HICCUPS…

Everything was looking rosy for Chris Millard. Last year, the UK's first Computer Gaming Expo (CGE UK) had been a huge success and we revealed a few months ago that it would be joining GameZone Live at London's ExCel this September. Then disaster struck when ELSPA revealed that the event has been cancelled due to lack of interest from its biggest supporters. We spoke to Millard in order to hear the full story.

g™: Was it much of a shock when you heard that GameZone Live had been cancelled?
CM: Yes, very much so. The timing was also poor, as we found out the day before the rest of the gaming world. We were also in the process of moving our website to a new host, and as we had no website up at the exact time that the news went public, everyone thought the worst.

g™: How did you feel about the cancellation?
CM: GameZone Live would have given us the opportunity to springboard our event – there were an expected 140,000 visitors so we would have had an awful lot of exposure. We're very disappointed, to be honest.

g™: You'll be holding CGE UK at Fairfield Halls in Croydon again. How do its owners feel about having another retro event there?
CM: Last year saw such a positive response from visitors and exhibitors alike that the staff at the Halls enjoyed hosting the weekend for us and are keen to be involved again. Many of them liked playing on the consoles and looking round as much as the visitors did.


▼ Matthew Smith should be making an appearance at this year's CGEUK. Which he's clearly very excited about…

g™: What has support been like for this year's event?
CM: Well, the exhibitors and guests have been exceptional – especially considering the turn of events with GameZone Live. CGE UK was designed to appeal to everyone, and last year's event was very popular and successful so people want to take part in it again.

g™: Do you have any new guest stars appearing since we last spoke to you?
CM: Well, the current line-up is looking pretty good. We have Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean, Andy Nuttall and Jonathon Cauldwell. Andy Nuttall should be bringing some of the other Bullfrog staff with him, and Simon Butler and Mark Jones Jr from Ocean Software are also coming. We're also hoping to have Mark Knight (known to many as the Mad Fiddler) coming along to play some live music.

g™: How many people turned up last year and do you expect this figure to increase?
CM: We had just over 1,000 visitors last year – not bad for our first event. Advertising was very limited and we had to rely on magazines and websites doing what they can to promote us – we don't make any profit from this, it's a labour of love and is self-funded. With the comments we've had so far, we're hoping for somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 visitors this year – a lot of people didn't come last year because they didn't think we'd pull it off. Well, we did and we got a lot of people telling us they wish they'd come.

GAMING NEWS

Are You Shaw?

RETROSOFT AND THE SHAW BROTHERS TO RE-RELEASE OLD CLASSICS

Retrosoft has announced an exclusive deal that will see the Shaw Brothers re-releasing many of their old Spectrum titles for handheld platforms like the TapWave and PalmOS. Between 1985 and 1992 the brothers released over 43 Spectrum titles and Paul Andrews of Retro-Soft.co.uk is hoping that all of the siblings' games will get re-released.

"We're delighted to be working with such prolific and well-known names from the Spectrum's illustrious past," said Andrews. "This new deal injects more life into one of Britain's most popular 8-bit home computers and also allows popular games to appear on a new generation of hardware."

While no titles have been confirmed, we're expecting games like *Skatin' USA*, and *Air-to-Air Combat* to be the first ports.



Busted!

FBI CRACKS DOWN ON RETRO PIRATES

While piracy often focuses on more recent titles, there are still plenty of unscrupulous people who are making a fortune from retro games.

Four people were arrested in a recent raid in New York involving 40 FBI agents. Following the arrests, over 60,000 illegal gaming machines were seized. Among the goods found was a device called the Power Player containing a massive amount of illegal NES ROMs such as *Duck Hunt* and *The Legend Of Zelda*.

Unsurprisingly, Nintendo is extremely pleased about the recent raids – it's estimated that it lost around $860 million due to piracy in 2004. "Nintendo will continue to work with local, state, national and international authorities to combat the growing problem of product piracy around the world," said Jodi Daugherty, Nintendo of America's director of anti-piracy.

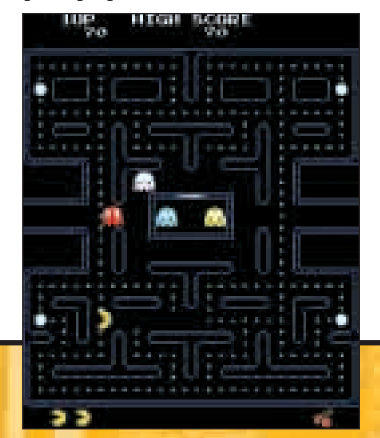
Mobile Munching

PAC-MAN CELEBRATES PHONE SUCCESS

He may be celebrating his twenty-fifth anniversary, but there seems to be no stopping Namco's world-famous pill muncher, Pac-Man.

Sales figures from Europe, the Middle East and Africa have revealed that *Pac-Man* was the most downloaded mobile game on four of the leading mobile service providers. Add to this the fact that downloads increased on a month-by-month basis and it's obvious that the yellow one has lost none of his charm.

After dominating the arcade scene in the early Eighties (and becoming the best-selling coin-operated game in history) *Pac-Man* has demonstrated astonishing feats of games-industry endurance. The millions of *Pac-Man* downloads are surely testament to a gaming legend.



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events…

MAY '05

Vampire Darkstalkers Collection
Date: 19 May **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBC
After the disappointing loading times of the PSP version, let's hope that the PS2 release of this compilation has more in common with the Dreamcast Matching Service title. All the *Vampire Chronicle* games should be present and correct, so in our best Ant and Dec voices, 'let's get ready to rumble'.

Space Invaders Pocket
Date: 26 May **Publisher:** Taito **Price:** £26
Proving that the PSP isn't just about flashy visuals, Taito will be releasing a bumper *Space Invaders* compilation at the end of May. Included on the UMD will be remakes of *Space Invaders*, *Space Invaders Part 2*, *Return Of The Invaders*, *Super Space Invaders '91* and *Space Invaders '95*, so start saving.

JUNE '05

Dragon Force
Date: 28 June **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** £16
Dragon Force was a superb strategy title on the Saturn and featured tense battles, hundreds of sprites and increasingly strategic gameplay. As a result, we're more than interested to see what the PlayStation2 version has to offer.

AUGUST '05

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)
Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA
Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can be sure that 2005's event will be even better.

CGE UK
Date: 13 August **Location:** Fairfield Halls, Croydon **Price:** TBC
After the success of last year's event, we've been told that this year's CGE UK is going to be even bigger. Look out for guest appearances from Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean, Jeff Minter and several ex-Ocean staff. And that's just for starters….

SEPTEMBER '05

Jagfest '05
Date: TBC **Location:** TBC **Price:** TBC
Details are still sketchy at the moment, but Jagfest UK should be returning this year. The event has been running for several years and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

OCTOBER '05

Sega Classics Collection
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC
Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for PS2. *Golden Axe*, *OutRun*, *Space Harrier* and *Columns* are just a few of the games on offer.

Midway Arcade Treasures 3
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Midway **Price:** TBC
Keen to try something new, Midway's third compilation has a racing theme and features the likes of *Hydro Thunder*, *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *Badlands*. Let's just hope *Hydro Thunder* is the original arcade game and not the mediocre PlayStation version.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE



SOLOMON'S KEY

TECMO DIDN'T JUST MAKE BEAT-'EM-UPS, YOU KNOW

Think of a Tecmo game and the first thing that pops into your head could be anything from breathtaking visuals to bouncing breasts. While it's better known nowadays for the likes of *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* and *Ninja Gaiden*, Tecmo used to try its hand at quite a few genres, with one of our favourites being *Solomon's Key*. Part platformer, part puzzle game, *Solomon's Key* was enjoyable proof that a perfect balance between two genres could be achieved.

Despite the alarming toughness of later levels, *Solomon's Key* remains a great little puzzler with endless replay value. This was mainly due to its simple premise – unlock the exit to the level by retrieving the key. Oh, and avoid all the enemies while you're at it. Each level was built of a series of blocks that would work as platforms, steps or even prisons for certain enemies. Successfully negotiate the platforms, reach the key and then the goal and you could quickly move on to the next level – simple…

Well, not really, as each level was filled with plenty of monsters, traps and a strict time limit to ensure that you didn't dawdle. Luckily, although the odds were seemingly stacked against you, you had some very useful weapons at your disposal. If a certain enemy proved particularly difficult to bypass (even the briefest of touches would cause instant death) you could simply fry it with a well-placed fireball. Sadly, you only had a finite supply of the handy spell (although you could increase this by collecting power-ups), so great care had to be taken whenever you used it.

Fortunately, your greatest power could be used as many times as you saw fit. A simple wave of your magic wand would cause a block to appear, which you could then use as a platform to reach inaccessible areas. The miraculous wand would also make unwanted blocks disappear. It was this handy device that allowed you to manipulate the layout of each level and twist it to your own ends. Of course, some blocks were impervious to your wand's abilities, but you'd always be able to find alternative routes.

It was this puzzle solving that made *Solomon's Key* such a joy to play. There was no set route through a level, it simply came down to how quickly you could negotiate the blocks you had created. This gave *Solomon's Key* an instant replay factor that was missing from similar games and ensured that you'd always go back for one last go. It was even treated to some impressive home conversions (with the Amstrad version being a particular favourite) and can also be found on the PS2 as part of Tecmo's Japanese *Hit Parade* compilation.

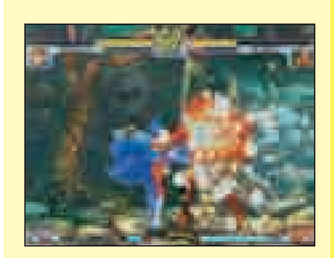
Despite its age and bizarre control method – we've never liked pushing up on a joystick to make a character jump – *Solomon's Key* is a solid, playable title and should be re-discovered at the earliest opportunity.

Release: 1986
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Tecmo
Developers: In-House



▲ So many blocks, so many enemies, only one way out. Sounds like the premise for an awesome film.

THIS MONTH WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE

System: Dreamcast
Publisher: Capcom

We're not sure what Capcom has done to us, but we've become fully ensnared by *3rd Strike*'s greatness. From Elena's cheap overhead middle kick to Dudley's devastating Corkscrew Punch, we simply can't get enough of it.

ROLAND ON THE ROPES

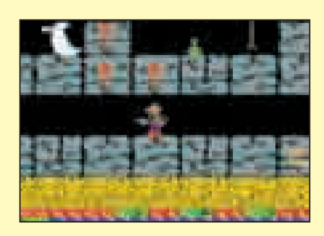
System: Amstrad
Publisher: Amsoft

***Roland On The Ropes* is absolute rubbish and yet for some reason we're still playing it. We blame it on those comedy noises he makes whenever he's climbing a rope, but then we're very easily pleased.**

STRIDER

System: PlayStation
Publisher: Capcom

It took its sweet time coming, but finally there's an arcade-perfect port of one of our favourite games. Yes, we've completed it dozens of times, yes, it's appeared in the mag on numerous occasions, but we couldn't care less. *Strider* is absolutely class, so there.

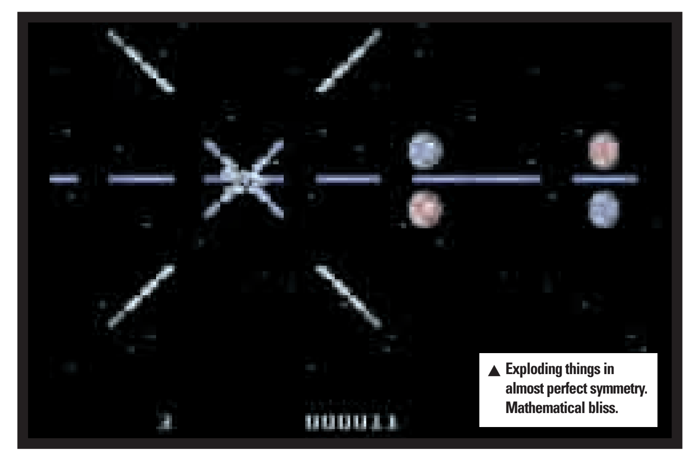


THE GAMES THAT NEVER MADE IT

ARMALYTE 2

A*rmalyte* has always been considered by Commodore 64 owners as one of the greatest shooters the machine has ever seen. So it was perhaps unsurprising that developer Cyberdyne Systems revealed it was planning to release a sequel. According to magazines at the time, *Armalyte 2* was due to be released at the end of 1989 or in early 1990 and was already starting to sound like a must-have.

While the first game boasted plenty of neat touches, Cyberdyne had even grander plans for the sequel – it was looking at adding more enhanced enemies and even a *Fantasy Zone*-style power-up shop. The Armalyte ship was to be suitably re-designed and everything was set to be a lot more colourful (the original game was quite drab in places).



▲ Exploding things in almost perfect symmetry. Mathematical bliss.

Sadly, despite a steady trickle of hype, *Armalyte 2*'s release date came and went and the game never appeared. So what was the reason behind *Armalyte 2*'s demise? While Cyberdyne was happy to work on its follow-up it had to take care of several System 3 games it was contracted to finish. As a result, the completion of titles such as *Last Ninja 3* and *Deadlock* meant that there was no time to continue work on *Armalyte 2* and it was shelved.

Fortunately, however, it does live on – albeit in uncompleted fragments – and can now be found on Frank Gasking's terrific Games That Weren't website. While unfinished, the clips give an exciting indication of Cyberdyne Systems' plans for its sequel, which makes the canning of this potentially great game all the more disappointing.

Thanks to Dan Philips (who also worked on the original *Armalyte*), Gasking's site also hosts a series of previews, which you can find at www.gtw64.co.uk.

Worst LICENCE EVER

Licensed games have a history of being at the shoddy end of the scale, but some manage to out-shoddy even the lamest and most tenuous games…

COUNT DUCKULA 2

We expect licensed games to be bad (we're cynical like that) but even we were unprepared for the sheer horror that assaulted us when we played *Count Duckula 2*. In a way it's our own fault; *Count Duckula* was never a great game in the first place, but our love for the excellent cartoon and the vocal stylings of David Jason convinced us that this time all would be well. How wrong we were…

After an incredibly mind-numbing version of the show's theme tune, you were treated to some of the worst visuals of 1992 (although, strangely, the Spectrum version looked miles better than the Amstrad game). While Duckula himself was just about recognisable he suffered from some horrendous animation and controls that would have been better suited to a three-toed sloth, such was their responsiveness. Try to turn him left or right and the garlic-hating duck would take an eternity to respond to your commands (if he reacted at all). Not only did this make it frustratingly hard to dodge enemies, it also made jumping extremely tricky.

Floating and moving platforms were just a few of the many hazards your clumsy duck had to negotiate, and thanks to the cumbersome controls any attempt at jumping usually resulted in death after irritating death. Indeed, it took us over an hour to just bypass the second screen in the game (and it's not because we lack the skills). Critically mauled by gamers and press, *Count Duckula 2* remains an abomination of gaming. Play it at your peril.

Release: 1992
Format: Spectrum, Amstrad
Publisher: Alternative Software Ltd
Developer: In-House



▲ Is there anything about this screenshot that compels you to play *Duckula 2*? Didn't think so…

CLASH OF THE TITANS

R•E•N•E•G•A•D•E

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer versions of the superb Taito coin-op hit *Renegade*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: To be honest, this isn't very good at all. While the backgrounds are reasonably okay, the actual sprites appear to have graduated from Lego University. Everything is blockier than a *Breakout* level and this gives the game a cutesy look that doesn't sit well with the violent action. Still, it gets extra points for the amusingly surprised expression of the main character.

SPECTRUM: This is a little better; while there's still a slight cartoony feel to the game, everything looks a lot tidier, with more detailed sprites and some surprisingly good animation. Sadly, the Renegade himself moves around ridiculously slowly and gives the impression that you're fighting unseen elements as well as vicious opponents.

AMSTRAD: Not only does *Renegade* look bloody fantastic, it's also one of the strongest conversions we've seen on the CPC. Ridiculously detailed sprites capture the gritty ambience of the original game and look utterly superb. You can even enter a code so that the blue blood can be changed to a much more satisfying claret. Great stuff.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Normally we'd expect the C64 to absolutely storm this section. Not today, though, as *Renegade* is rather disappointing on the ears. It lacks the aural punch of many C64 titles, and while the tunes are faithful to the original game, they just don't excite us that much. Even the spot effects are rather lame, so it's a thumbs down for the sound.

SPECTRUM: Considering the machine's audio limitations the Spectrum incarnations of *Renegade*'s tunes are actually pretty damn good. They zip along at an up-tempo pace and perfectly capture the spirit of the original tunes. Even the so-so spot effects are a lot better than the C64's efforts, so the Spectrum bags itself a respectable second place. So that means that first place goes to…

AMSTRAD: The Amstrad gets full marks for the second category running. Not only are the many tunes absolutely top notch, but the sound effects are as brutal as possible. From simple smacks in the face to the wince-inducing knee to the groin when you grab a stunned opponent, everything sounds bloody brilliant. A well-deserved first place.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Everyone hated *Renegade*'s control system when the game first came out because it was ridiculously hard to play with keys; it perfectly mimicked its arcade parent and required you to use three buttons to execute all your kicks, jumps and punches. Providing you had a joystick with sticky feet, though, it wasn't too much of a problem. If only the gameplay wasn't so sluggish...

SPECTRUM: It was great fun in its day but *Renegade* is now laboriously slow to play through and crawls along at a snail's pace. While it gains extra points for being much simpler to play (there was only one fire button so you could easily play it with just a joystick) its crippling pace and stodgy controls now kill it.

AMSTRAD: Yet another win for the CPC 464. The first thing you notice is just how quickly everything runs. Even now, your Renegade dashes around like the man on a mission that he so obviously is and while it features the same control issues as the C64 (which weren't really 'issues' anyway) it's helped by much more precise controls and that fast pace.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: C64

AND THE WINNER IS...

AMSTRAD

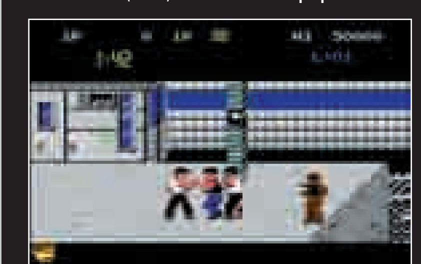
With three straight wins, the Amstrad emerges the unlikely winner. As with *Gryzor* before it, talented programmers proved that when there was a decent team behind the product, Alan Sugar's computer could do a hell of a lot more than just host ported Spectrum games. A first-class conversion and a very worthy winner.

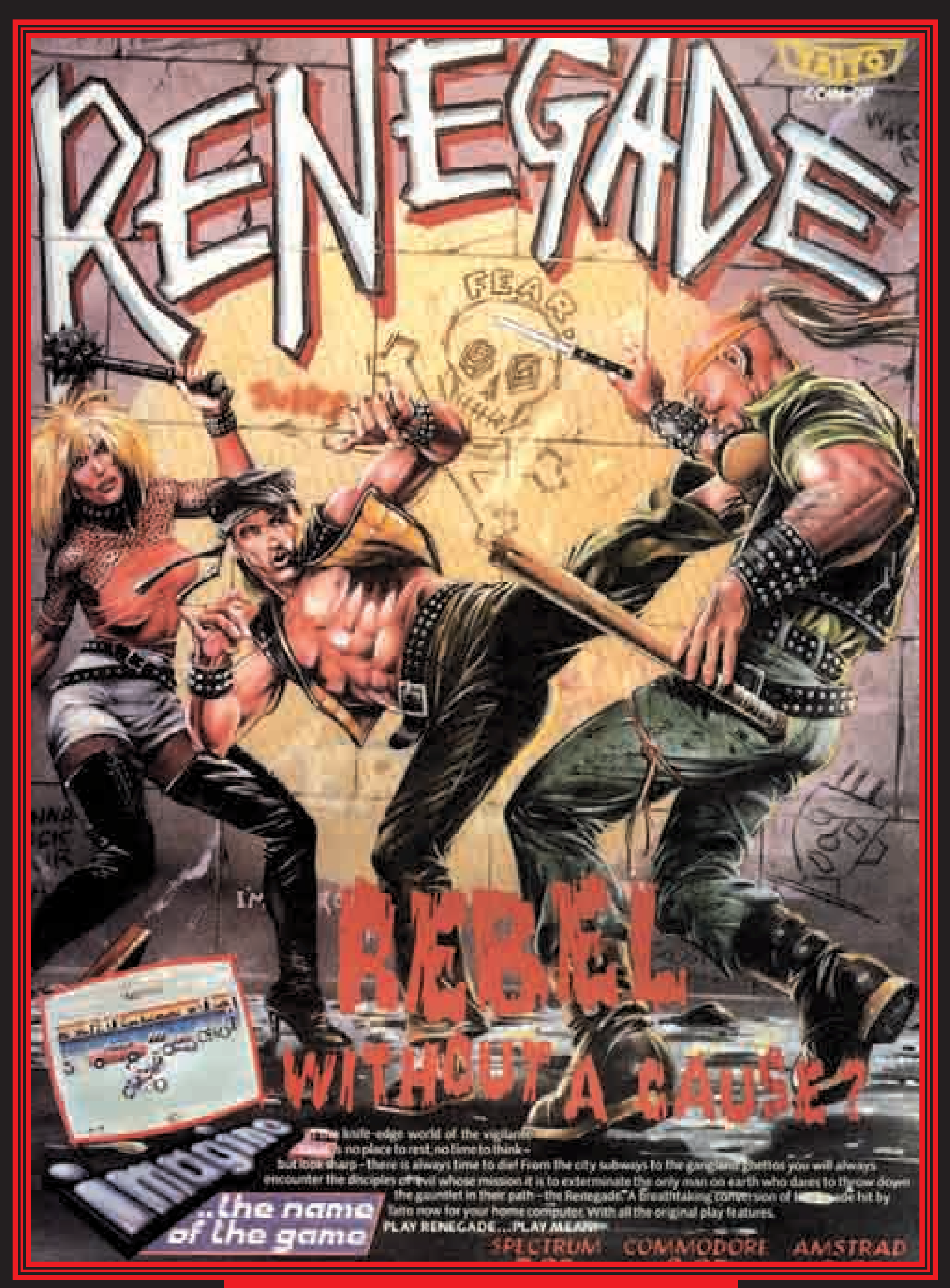


The Amstrad version (above) wins by a country mile.



The Commodore (below) turned in a rather sub-par performance.





RENEGADE (Various Home Systems) Imagine, 1987 – UK advertisement

Retro Machine





VIC-20

Yes, it looked like a bread bin, but the VIC-20 was a hugely important – and popular – computer. It marked Commodore's first international success, it pioneered home computing and it introduced legions of gamers to the World's Greatest Pastime™.

In the late Seventies, Commodore was becoming a market leader in personal business computers thanks to the popularity (and low price) of its CBM/PET range. Its machines were fully self-contained including a built-in BASIC programming language, machine code monitor, professional keyboard, memory and screen. Early revisions of these machines included a built-in tape recorder and a cheaper keyboard. This was all pretty revolutionary for the time, as until that point most micro-computers consisted of kits that you'd have to build and expand as required.

In a bid to stay ahead of the pack, Commodore needed a colour graphics computer, something that rivals Apple and Atari had already achieved but at a high retail price. So Chuck Peddle, developer of the PET range and earlier KIM-1 micro-computer kit, started work on a colour version of the PET, named the CBM 8033 (or 'Color PET'). Shortly after this, Commodore also developed a new graphics chip intended for third-party companies to use in its videogaming systems. This was the Video Interface Chip, or VIC. The intentions for the VIC changed when Commodore founder Jack 'Attack' Tramiel saw the new hardware in action.

According to former Commodore employee Bil Herd, Tramiel told the developers of the VIC to 'build it and ship it'. When asked to clarify, Tramiel was referring to the prototype system they were using to demonstrate its capabilities, and not the chip itself.

By 1981, news of Commodore's new colour computer, named after its graphics chip, started to surface in the UK press. The February 1981 issue of *Computing Today* reported that this new machine with colour, sound and 5K of RAM was to be launched in Japan, was able to use any standard

MACHINE SPECIFICATIONS

PROCESSOR: 6502A at 1.0227 MHz (NTSC) or 0.973 MHz (PAL)
LAUNCH PRICE: ¥69,800 (Japan), $299.95 (USA), around £189.95 (UK)
MEMORY: 5K RAM standard and potentially up to around 39K. RAM packs provided 3K, 8K or 16K of extra memory. The 32K RAM pack had no commercial software. The video RAM was shared as part of the computer's memory, and the OS and BASIC was held within a 16K ROM.
SOUND: Three channels generated from the VIC chip, which could be played independently.
GRAPHICS CAPABILITIES: 22 x 23 pre-set character matrix. It could display 16 colours in total (eight foreground and 16 background colours). Maximum resolution display of 224 x 224 pixels or 112 x 224 in multi-colour mode. The VIC chip could scroll the whole screen in any direction left, right, up or down.

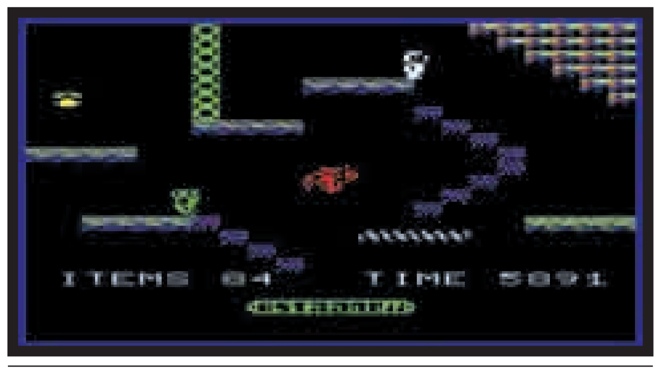


TV and was expected to retail at under £200. In fact, this wonder-computer had arrived in shops in Japan five months previously – news obviously travelled slower in the early Eighties…

(As for the ColorPET, incidentally, it never made it past the prototype stage. If Commodore had launched this instead of the VIC then it may never have found its way into the home computer market at all.)

BIG IN JAPAN

Commodore launched its new colour machine to a hungry Japanese public in October 1980 as the VIC 1001. This was a strategic move as Commodore wanted in on the fast-growing Japanese market, but saw that government subsidised computers were in danger of swamping the market. In launching the VIC first, Commodore had managed to stall – for a while, at least – the onslaught of these machines and capture a good portion of the market at the same time.



▲ Yes, it looks a little like *Jet Set Willy*, but *Astro Nell* is good in its own right. And it was only made last year.

The Japanese variant of the VIC had a few differences from the US and UK versions: the £ sign was replaced with a ¥ symbol, and it had a mode that would allow the typing of Katakana symbols and Western European letters.

The renamed VIC-20 was launched in America in the spring of 1981. Commodore offered this as the "first fully featured" home computer for just under $300, backed by aggressive marketing for the machine. It was pitted squarely against Atari's 2600 with TV advertising comparing the two machines and declaring that the VIC-20 was "a real computer at the cost of a toy" as the 2600 could only really play games. It also released many cartridge-based games that were mostly clones of titles popular at the time, such as *Avenger* (*Space Invaders*) and *Star Battle* (*Galaxian*).

In perhaps the biggest one-finger salute to Atari, Commodore released *Jelly Monsters*, a *Pac-Man* clone that was as pixel-perfect as the VIC could handle. Atari had bought the rights to release *Pac-Man* on its own and other home computers, and threatened Commodore with legal action over *Jelly Monsters*. Commodore repented and withdrew *Jelly Monsters* from its catalogue. In many ways the damage had already been done, as Atarisoft's official version of *Pac-Man* seemed like a token effort to bring the game to the VIC.

By the latter part of 1981, the VIC was launched in the UK. Keeping the same aggressive advertising campaign, Commodore declared that "The waiting is over. The rush has begun" in a two-page advertisement in *Computing Today*'s September 1981 issue, proudly proclaiming that "it's the best home computer in the world!".

Computing Today's review of the VIC was a little more sombre. It pointed out that, for instance, though the machine could load much of the CBM/PET tape-based software, its screen matrix of 22 x 23 characters wouldn't be adequate for many programs developed on a 40 x 25 display. It also had a small user memory of around 3.58K of RAM (though this was potentially expandable) and a poorly written manual that often left many questions unanswered.

More positively received, however, were the machine's colour graphics and sound, sturdy build, design and price. Although not apparently as suitable as a small business machine as the CBM/PET series, *Computing Today* concluded that "one must not lose sight of the fact that the VIC in some ways offers more facilities than the PET and is a fully fledged microcomputer in its own right."

GOOD FOR GAMING

Despite the VIC-20's obvious shortcomings in both memory and as a business machine, its gaming potential was apparent. With eight foreground and 16 background colours it could control many hundreds of 'MOBs' (Movable Object

A BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO THE VIC-20

The many variations of VIC

You may find you've bought a VC-20 rather than a VIC-20, and the reason for this is down to a good old-fashioned language barrier. The VIC-20's name had to be changed for the German market as VIC, if pronounced correctly in German, sounds very like 'fick', which translated means 'fk', it was therefore known as the VC-20 over there.**

As the machine was limited to one expansion port, Commodore developed a docking station for the VIC (such as the VIC 1010) which allowed many cartridges to be plugged into the system simultaneously. With the right combination of utility and RAM packs, this turned the VIC into a decent development system. By using RAM packs only, you could theoretically expand the machine's memory to around 39K, but you'd probably have to write your own software to make use of the extra memory above 16K.

As reported in issue six of *Computer & Video Games* (April 1982), Commodore was apparently working on a VIC-20 that had 16K RAM as standard. The most likely explanation for this was a repackaged 'VIC-21' or 'SuperVIC', which was marketed in the US in early 1983 as a new, upgraded machine. However, it was simply a standard VIC-20 that included a 16K RAM pack.

Software Project's game *Perils Of Willy* was meant to be a conversion of *Manic Miner* from the Spectrum. However, it wasn't possible to port a faithful version of the game even with an extra 16K RAM, due to the machine's lower resolution. *Perils Of Willy* was still a good attempt and was released anyway as a game in its own right. In 2004, Matt Simmonds produced a stunning *Jet Set Willy*-inspired game called *Astro Nell* for the unexpanded machine.



CHEAP AS CHIPS?

The VIC-20 itself isn't that hard to find, unless you discover one with a box in near-perfect condition. Roughly speaking, VICs exchange hands for around £15, with the VC-20 (see Bluffer's Guide) and VIC 1001 commanding a higher value. Because of its short shelf life, it's the unique hardware that's worth a bit more. The 1540 disk drive, for instance, doesn't come up for auction all too often, and can fetch around £50.

The average game cartridge is worth around £5 unboxed, and a little more boxed depending on the condition of the packaging; games on tape usually sell at anything up to £5 each. RAM expansions and Super Expanders up to 16K are worth around £8 with packaging; 32K RAM packs and above, which were introduced late on in the machine's life, could get you up to £20 if the right punter is looking.

As with most things Commodore, though, it's important to remember that many items for the VIC-20 were mass produced and are generally not that rare.

Blocks, a precursor to sprite graphics), load software from cartridge, tape or (eventually) disk and generate wide-ranging sound effects. To get around the limited resolution and chunky multicolour mode, the screen could be resized up to a 28 x 28 character matrix (224 x 224 pixels high resolution), though at this size some of the pixels would be cropped off the screen. Compared to its peers, and especially to the British computers around at the time, it was able to compete very well on a technical level.

Computer & Video Games magazine warmed to the VIC-20 very quickly. Being the self-proclaimed "first fun computer magazine", it published game listings for the VIC from the first issue, as well as reviewing the game *Gold Rush* by Manchester-based software house Mr. Micro. Thereafter, entertainment software from third-party developers quickly picked up, and even though memory expansions were available, adding up to 16K of extra RAM, many games were written for unexpanded machines.

One of the best sources of cheap games were printed listings in magazines. The fun part, apparently, was working out the errors in the listings and correcting them to get the game to work. This spurred on many bedroom programmers to tout their own creations to the growing number of publishers at the time – possibly why many VIC-20 games released were written in BASIC, and were a little on the sluggish side.

In 1982, Commodore launched the VIC-20's dedicated disk drive, the 1540. With the VIC dropping in price to under £170, the 1540 retailed at an astounding £335, and Commodore's support for the device was somewhat lacklustre. In an attempt to show the machine's benefits for small businesses, Commodore released *VIC File* (a spreadsheet) and *VIC Write* (word processor) on disk. With virtually no other software support, and the 1540's compatibility problems with Commodore's new C64, the drive was pulled from production. Its replacement was the backwards compatible and cheaper 1541, but this was still almost double the cost of a new VIC-20, and still no commercial software appeared on disk.

GOING STRONG

During the early Eighties, worldwide sales of the VIC-20 were consistently strong, and Commodore had a temporary supply and demand problem. At one point, more than 5,000 machines were being manufactured per day just to keep up with consumer demand. The machine's price began to drop, and new starter packs were offered including free software, a cassette player and improved documentation.

By November 1983, the machine by itself cost under £100, and Commodore was still upbeat about it, though it was downgraded to "the finest home computer that money can buy". This was due to the introduction of the Commodore 64 which launched in America in January of 1982. In spite of this, new software was still in abundance. Over 100 cartridges were already available, with many more games on tape.

One of the most well known companies to spring up was Jeff Minter's Llamasoft, offering fast-paced, colourful games with unique concepts involving portals to hellish dimensions, or featuring yaks and llamas. Minter's somewhat psychedelic games were among the best examples you could buy, and are today considered VIC masterpieces in design and concept.

"FOR SOMETHING THAT BEGAN AS A MERE GRAPHICS CHIP, THE VIC-20 IS REMARKABLE"



▲ Why fork out a princely £5 for a new game when you can spend four weeks typing one in?

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

In 1984, the December edition of *Commodore Computing International* posed the question "Is the VIC dead?". Commodore had stopped production of the VIC-20 in September of that year, and with it new games had started to dry up. Commodore switched its attention to the C64 and its new machines the 264 (Plus/4) and C16.

The latter was considered a replacement to the VIC as an entry-level computer; however, computer games were becoming bigger and more sophisticated, and it was not generally thought that the new C16 would handle this new era of gaming any better than the old VIC-20 could with a 16K RAM pack, other than having a higher resolution and a greater colour palette. Sales of the VIC still officially continued until early 1985, but in commercial terms, this was the end of the line.

The VIC-20 was a phenomenal success, though it's quite easy to consign it to the history books simply as Commodore's first colour computer. But don't forget that it was the closest you could get to a professional-build personal computer in its price range, it pre-dated Sinclair's ZX81, and sold over two million units worldwide – that's four times more than the sales of the entire Amstrad CPC range – and gave Commodore a path into the home computer market.

For something that started out life as a graphics chip, all of this is a remarkable feat. And although Commodore never emulated its Japanese success with the C64 and Max machines, it became a world leader in the home computer market until its demise in the early Nineties. And all of this because of the VIC-20, arguably one of the most important home computers ever made.

I ❤ THE VIC-20

The Commodore VIC-20 was the reason I used the computer labs during my dinner hour in high school. Among the sea of BBC Micros, and dwarfing the ZX Spectrum that sat next to it, the VIC was the only machine with real class.

Commodore began its expedition into the home computing market with this machine. It was, and still is, aesthetically pleasing and had many excellent games from the likes of Mastertronics, Llamasoft, Rabbit Soft and even Commodore. And it's my favourite Commodore-branded computer as it has a cool factor that other machines don't quite manage.

Finally, I love the VIC-20 because from such apparent simplicity come some great games; it represents an era when the industry was finding its feet and true creativity was driving entertainment software. An era which is sadly often overlooked, just like this great machine.

DARRAN JONES



A NES, ONLY NOT...

A HANDHELD THAT PLAYS NES GAMES BUT ISN'T A GAME BOY ADVANCE? CALL THE LAWYERS...

Price: £49.99
Release: Out Now

Fancy playing classic Nintendo Entertainment System games but baulk at paying £15 a pop? Then you might want to treat yourself to a Blaze Pocket Fami and once again enjoy all those bulky classic NES titles that are currently sitting unused at the back of your gaming cupboard…

While the device has been available in Japan for some time, the high import price has no doubt persuaded many retro gamers not to bother with it. Luckily for us, though, Blaze has decided to launch Gametech's console in the UK, and after giving it a solid playtest it turns out to be quite a nifty piece of kit.

Of course, this being a 'grey' import you have to take into account that it's not going to have the same sort of build quality as an official machine. For starters, it feels rather cheap and tacky to the touch and doesn't exactly reassure when you're holding it (something that's critical for a handheld). However, the face buttons (two normal, two autofire) are responsive enough and despite its cheap looks, the machine is surprisingly durable. We did have a few problems with the D-pad (we kept selecting down by mistake) but this may have just been our oversized thumbs.

The most important aspect of the device is the screen and we're pleased to say that it holds up admirably. While it can't hope to match the picture quality of the current generation of handhelds, the 2.5-inch screen is perfectly useable and suffers none of the screen-blur that has plagued older handhelds.

Granted, due to the sheer size of NES cartridges it's unlikely that you'll be brave enough to play the Pocket Fami in public (the carts double the size of the machine), but the handheld does have another use. Thanks to a composite lead that's included with the machine, you can link the Pocket Fami directly into any compatible TV. There are two joystick ports in the base of the machine for additional pads, or you can simply use the Fami itself as a joypad, giving you what is essentially a perfect NES substitute.

Actually, it's even better because the Fami can play games from all regions. We tried several different titles and didn't find any compatibility problems, although considering the vast amount of games out there, it's possible that a few may not work on the machine.

We have to say we're mightily impressed with the Pocket Fami. It works fairly well as a portable device, is a great alternative to using your ancient NES and has the impressive ability to play games from any region. The battery life isn't amazing (we got around five hours from two AA batteries) but it will take a 9V power supply, which is easy enough to get hold of if you look around.

Of course, considering how protective Nintendo is of its intellectual property, we wouldn't be at all surprised if it decides takes a closer interest in Blaze's new machine. Our advice is to pick one up while you can. Who knows, it may become a collectors' item for all the wrong reasons…



BONANZA BROS. (Arcade) Sega, 1990 – Japanese arcade flyer





SEGA C·L·A·S·S·I·C·S C·O·L·L·E·C·T·I·O·N

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2**
PRICE: **$20**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **3D AGES**
RELEASE: **TBC (US: OUT NOW)**

AFTER THE SUCCESS OF ITS SONIC MEGA COLLECTION, SEGA IS KEEN TO HAVE ANOTHER CRACK OF THE WHIP WITH THE RELEASE OF THE SEGA CLASSICS COLLECTION IN AMERICA. HOWEVER, UNLIKE OTHER RETRO COMPILATIONS ALL THE GAMES HERE HAVE HAD A FACE-LIFT – AND IN SOME CASES A FEW GAMEPLAY TWEAKS –TO ALLOW THEM TO COMPETE WITH TODAY'S FLASHIER TITLES. BUT HAS THE RESTORATION WORKED? RETRO TAKES A GANDER…


▲ Fairly average then, pretty mediocre now.

MONACO GRAND PRIX

There are always a few duffers on any compilation, so it was inevitable that a few have turned up on Sega's latest release. While there's nothing wrong with the updated visuals and new gameplay modes, we just couldn't get excited about this 25-year-old game. It's kind of like playing the original *SpyHunter*, yet it boasts none of the excitement – a shame really as there are a fair few extras included. Still, this is proof – if it were needed – that no amount of fancy updates can turn a mediocre game into a classic.

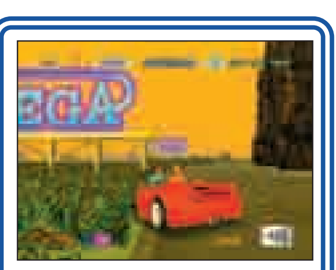


GOLDEN AXE

Playing *Golden Axe* is like coming home to find your house ransacked, your family killed and your entire games collection missing. No matter how hard we've tried, we simply can't figure out how 3D Ages was able to make a game that's worse than the classic arcade title, let alone the original Mega Drive version. Granted, the remixed soundtrack is wonderfully nostalgic, but the hideously animated characters, horribly bland gameplay and chronic amounts of slowdown mean that you probably won't want to bother getting past the first level. Absolutely shocking.



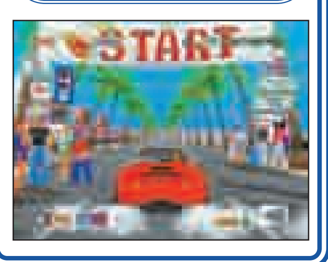




OUT RUN

Ah, *Out Run*. Even after all these years you're still as good as the first day we took you for a test drive. Considering this is perhaps the most well-known game in the collection we're pleased to report that 3D Ages has lavished plenty of attention on it. It's not going to give *Out Run 2* anything to worry about in the visual stakes, but there's a wealth of great modes to choose from, an arranged soundtrack that sounds utterly superb and the wonderfully slick gameplay is as good as ever. If only the original version had been included…





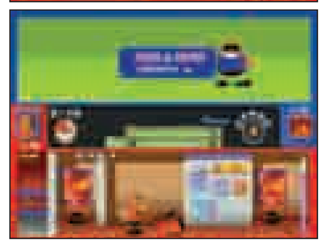


SPACE HARRIER

This is more like it. While this PS2 incarnation of *Space Harrier* lacks the same gob-smacking visuals that made the original arcade version such a dream to play, it remains a thoroughly enjoyable blaster. The majority of the original gameplay has been left largely untouched, and while several power-ups such as a force shield and screen-obliterating smart bomb have been included, they don't intrude on the original classic gameplay. If you're looking for a frantic blaster, *Space Harrier* fits the bill perfectly

SCORE 7/10





BONANZA BROS

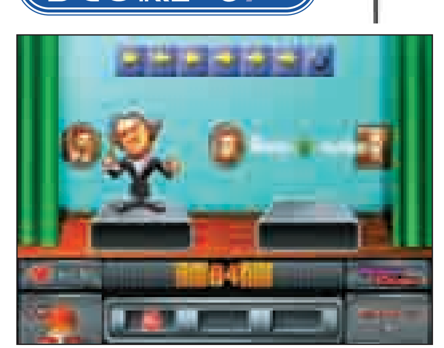
There's never really been a decent home conversion of *Bonanza Bros*, so we're really glad to see that the PlayStation2 version has turned out so well. All the cute charm of the original game has been retained, and though the gameplay is rather simplistic by today's standards – avoid or beat up guards to escape from a building after nicking stuff – it gets more difficult on later stages. While it's not as well regarded as some of the more popular games on the compilation, we're definitely pleased *Bonanza Bros* has been included and have already wasted many happy hours on it.



TANT-R

Included as part of the *Bonanza Bros* pack when it was released in Japan, *Tant-R* proves to be a pretty good selection of mini-games that even includes a neat four-player mode. While hardly any of the puzzles on display are particularly taxing (and often verge on the simplistic), they're all good fun to play and remind us of the *WarioWare* series. Yes, *Tant-R*'s games lack the same frantic pace but they feature similar elements, wacky characters and plenty of charm.



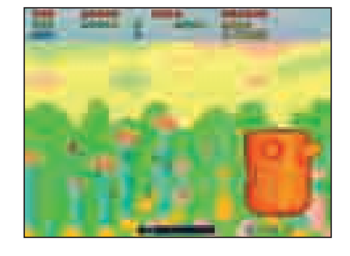


▲ *Tant-R* is a curiously pleasing title, reminiscent of *WarioWare*. But with fewer bushy moustaches.

FANTASY ZONE

While *Fantasy Zone* has seen its fair share of changes (even if many of them are purely cosmetic) it still remains one of the stronger titles on Sega's compilation. Maybe it's the fact that the simple but wonderful gameplay has been left alone, or it could be that the new sections (like the into-the-screen bonus stages) really enhance the original gameplay. Whatever it is that makes it so enjoyable, *Fantasy Zone* is still an amazingly cute Sega classic and we love it to bits.





ALIEN SYNDROME

▲ Alien Syndrome isn't a recognised condition. If it was, we reckon it would be a bit like a bad cold.

Though we were never huge fans of the original arcade game, we're really enjoying 3D Ages' update and have been racking up some huge combos and impressive scores. While the visuals are rather messy and feature unimaginative opponents and dreary 'futuristic' backdrops, the *Smash TV*-style gameplay is absolutely spot-on. It won't take you very long to beat and there's little to bring you back to it, but while it lasts *Alien Syndrome* proves to be surprisingly good – if rather mindless – fun.



COLUMNS

Despite its simple looks and straightforward gameplay, *Columns* has enduring appeal and brings back many fond memories. Of course, *Tetris* still holds the crown as far as falling-block puzzle games go, but Sega's combination of soothing music and frantic gameplay means that *Columns* is still worth a look. Granted, its chain reactions lack the subtlety or skill of later puzzlers, and its looks are hardly eye-popping, but its inclusion on the disc makes for a refreshingly sedate change of pace from all the action titles that are lined up elsewhere in the collection.





▲ See, this is basically *Tetris*. But then *Tetris* is like, er, Connect 4. Well, in a roundabout way…



▲ Ignore the fact your pit crew are ludicrously angular, this is still a great game.

VIRTUA RACING

Even with all its dodgy pop-up *Virtua Racing* remains the cream of the *Classics Collection* and is easily worth the £12 asking price. While everything is nice and slick (and running at a silky 60 frames per second) it still looks and, more importantly, plays just like the 1992 original. There's a great selection of extra modes as well, so once you've cleared the arcade version you can try your hand at the impressive Grand Prix mode or simply battle head-to-head with a mate. A superb conversion of a timeless title.

SCORE 9/10

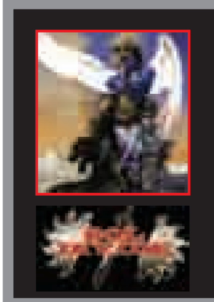
THE VERDICT

While there are a few solid titles here, the overall compilation is dragged down by the inclusion of stinkers like *Golden Axe*. It's also a crying shame that 3D Ages didn't include the original arcade versions (it wouldn't have been hard to do, after all). Sega fans should give it the once over, but just don't expect the earth.

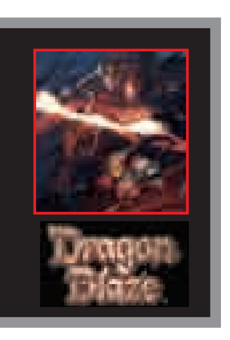




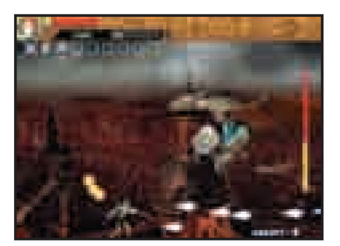
彩京シューティング
P·S·I·K·Y·O S·H·O·O·T·I·N·G C·O·



Format:
PlayStation2
Release:
Out Now (Japan)
Publisher:
Taito
Developer:
Psikyo
Price:
¥7,140







▲ This early *Sol Divide* boss may look tough but he's actually a pushover. All mouth and no trousers.



▲ At least this new version of *Sol Divide* allows you to sell your Saturn version for a decent price…

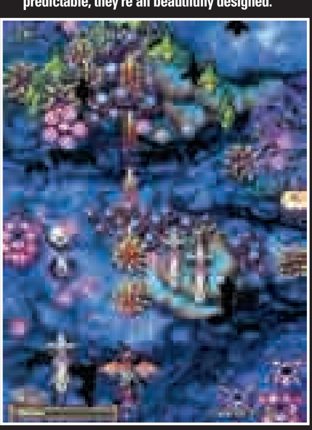
When Psikyo closed its doors in 2002, you could almost hear shoot-'em-up fans the world over weeping their little hearts out. While more casual players bemoaned the fact that all the developer's games looked and played identically, true shmup fans realised just how wrong the nay-sayers were and still rate Psikyo highly. It would appear similar sentiments are held by Taito, as it's recently released a Psikyo showcase in the form of its third *Shooting Collection* (volume one contained the double whammy of *Strikers 1945 I* and *II*, while volume two included *Sengoku Ace* and *Sengoku Blaede*).

Compilation three is a bit of a mixed bag, as it contains the rather spiffy *Dragon Blaze* (never before released on a home console), and the not-so-spiffy *Sol Blade* (which has already been treated to Saturn and PlayStation conversions). Now, though, both titles are packaged together on one disc, so let's dive in and take a closer look.

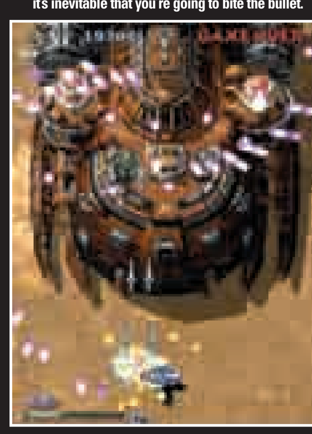
PLAY TIME

We want to love *Sol Divide*, we really do. The setting is absolutely beautiful: gloriously detailed griffins

▼ While *Dragon Blaze*'s levels are somewhat predictable, they're all beautifully designed.



▼ When you're facing off against a huge Cave boss, it's inevitable that you're going to bite the bullet.



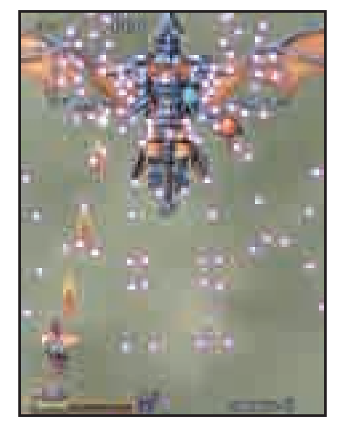
グコレクションVol.3

L•L•E•C•T•I•O•N V•O•L•U•M•E 3


▲ So is this a shooter or a Harryhausen movie? Disgruntled readers need to know now.

and dragons fly past meticulously detailed gothic cities and give Psikyo's horizontally scrolling shooter masses of appeal. Sadly, all this sumptuous attention to detail has been for nothing, as *Sol Divide* is a hugely frustrating experience.

The biggest problem is the size of your main character – it's incredibly easy to hit and seems to attract bullets like moths to a flame. Then you have the risk and reward-style close combat fighting, which enables you to go toe-to-toe with an enemy in melee combat for extra points. Again, though, you'll continually find yourself taking



stupid amounts of damage, as you can't avoid being hit. It's a real shame as there's plenty to like about *Sol Divide*. There's a decent weapon system, plenty of power-ups to choose from and some very impressive bosses to go up against. If only you had a fairer chance to avoid the game's bullet patterns…

Luckily, *Dragon Blaze* is a much better effort and draws you in until you're peppered with a ridiculous

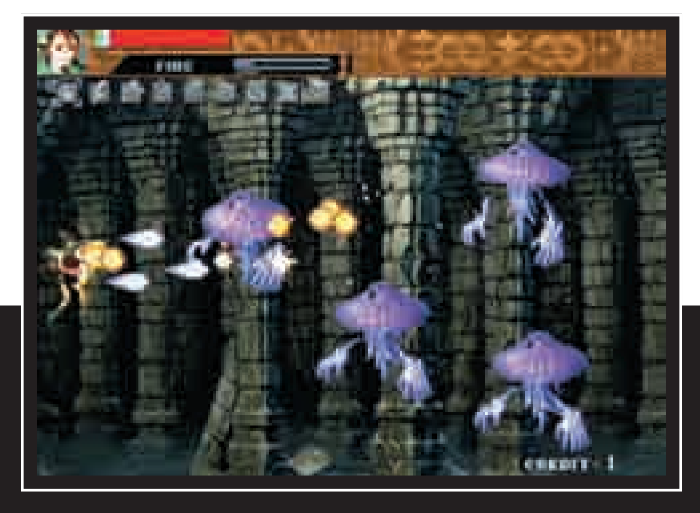

▲ Look how bloody big those griffins are. How on earth are you supposed to avoid them? Ah, you can't…

amount of bullets and whimpering like a child. It's one of the tougher shooters that Psikyo released and while it starts off relatively easy, the difficulty level quickly ramps up to insane proportions.

Whereas most shooters are content to leave their bullet-fests for each boss encounter, *Dragon Blaze* thinks nothing of making you continually fight through a maze of bullets. It's certainly tough but not impossible, and providing you stay away from the infinite credits (a fault that's also true of *Sol Divide*) you'll find a thoroughly rewarding game.

While it essentially plays like the *Strikers* franchise (albeit with dragons instead of planes) *Dragon Blaze* has plenty of its own neat little touches that help make it stand out. You can dismount from your dragon and hurl it towards an enemy for huge amounts of points, power up your dragon's attacks by holding down the fire button, and unleash a handy smart bomb that causes massive amounts of destruction. There's even a handy Tate mode to really bring the arcade experience home (although you may want to check your TV warranty before turning your set on its side).

If it wasn't for the below-average *Sol Divide*, this would be an essential purchase; as it stands, you may want to think carefully before you splash the cash.



O•V•E•R•A•L•L S•C•O•R•E 69%





WE SPEAK TO ARCHER MACLEAN ABOUT HIS LOVE OF COLLECTING AND RESTORING ARCADE MACHINES

Archer Maclean is a man of many talents. He's well known for the ridiculous amount of great games that he made in the early Eighties and mid-Nineties, but he also has several other hidden skills. Not only is he the owner of one of the largest private coin-op collections in Europe, but he's also a dab hand at putting the little blighters back together again. Retro took time out to gaze over Archer's absurdly cool collection and find out just how he does it…

THE INTERVIEW

games™: When did you first take an interest in coin ops?

Archer Maclean: When I was about 10 years old I remember seeing my first *Pong* machine. We were on a school trip and the teacher told me to get some ice creams for the rest of the class. I walked through a seafront arcade in order to get to the ice cream vendor on the other side and there was this bright yellow *Pong* machine. I'd never seen any electronic game at this point and after watching the dot moving around the screen for a while I ended up spending all the ice cream money on it. I then got a huge telling off from the teacher after I told her that I'd been beaten up and had all the money stolen. As I got older I would go and hunt down new arcades and machines to play on, even if it meant I had to cycle for 20 miles.

g™: When did you buy your first machine and how much did it cost?

AM: I bought my first full-sized machine around 1984, as I had some royalties coming in for *Dropzone*. An arcade operator had placed an ad in the local paper as he was closing down, so I phoned him up to see what he had left. He mentioned a battered (but working) *Defender* that I could have for £100 if I was still interested. Needless to say, I couldn't get there quick enough. I only had a hatchback but I still managed to get this entire machine into the back of it, with about three foot of it sticking out the back of the car.

Within months of that first purchase I bought *Robotron* (which I've now had for 21 years), *Star Gate* and a *Space Invaders* that was about seven or eight years old. At the time all these operators had no idea their machines would become collectable and they were simply trashing them or allowing them to gather dust.

g™: You now have over 150 machines. Where do you keep them all?

AM: I'm lucky in that I have quite a few large cellar rooms under my house (they're not smartly decorated, but there's plenty of space) and a very sizeable garage where I do all my restorations, so that's where everything can now be found. At the moment, though, I've reached the limit of what I can currently store and need to rethink things.

g™: Is there anything you're still after?

AM: Well, I was looking for *Domino Man*, which is a simple game of standing dominos up and knocking them down, but I've now managed to secure one in America. It's currently sitting pretty in Chicago and is in completely mint condition so I won't even need to worry about restoring it. The only other title I'm still after at the moment is a Nichibutsu *Crazy Climber*. I say the Nichibutsu version because it's a very unusually shaped machine from Japan and is very different to the UK machine that everyone remembers. A mate of mine, Oliver, has actually got one but he doesn't play it – it simply sits in storage. So, Ol, if you're reading this, drop me a line.

g™: What sort of contacts have you made over the years and how easy is it for you to source cabinets?

AM: I've got a massive amount of friends and contacts in America, mainly because that's where all the machines were. Arcades were absolutely everywhere at one time. You could go out, have a burger and then head off to the arcades with your






Retro Feature

"I SPENT THE TEACHER'S ICE-CREAM MONEY ON PONG BUT TOLD HER I'D BEEN ROBBED"

mates – America was where everything was happening. While the same thing did happen here, the scene was nowhere near as big. There's a massive amount of collectors in the US, whereas in England there appears to be a lot of people simply squabbling over rotten wood, as there's not much left of the actual machines (in part, though, this is mainly due to the British climate, as it doesn't really lend itself to arcade collecting). While I have built up more contacts in America there are still quite a few serious collectors in the UK and you quickly get to know who they all are.

g™: You've got one of the largest private coin-op collections in Europe. Have you ever considered opening it up to the public?

AM: Usually, if I'm going to have a meeting it's for half a dozen or so friends out of the collecting fraternity and they'll all come around for a glass or two. In terms of public stuff, the biggest problem is that practically everything is at my house. The one time that I had a bunch of complete strangers around a few of them misbehaved and just walked around my house taking photos. Finally, a lot of my restored machines are in absolutely pristine condition. It's almost as if they've come out of a time warp and the thought of someone putting their pint on the top like they used to absolutely horrifies me.



g™: So it's not something you'll consider again in the future?

AM: Well, one thing I am thinking about is putting 20 or 30 machines somewhere else and occasionally opening it up like a museum, but that

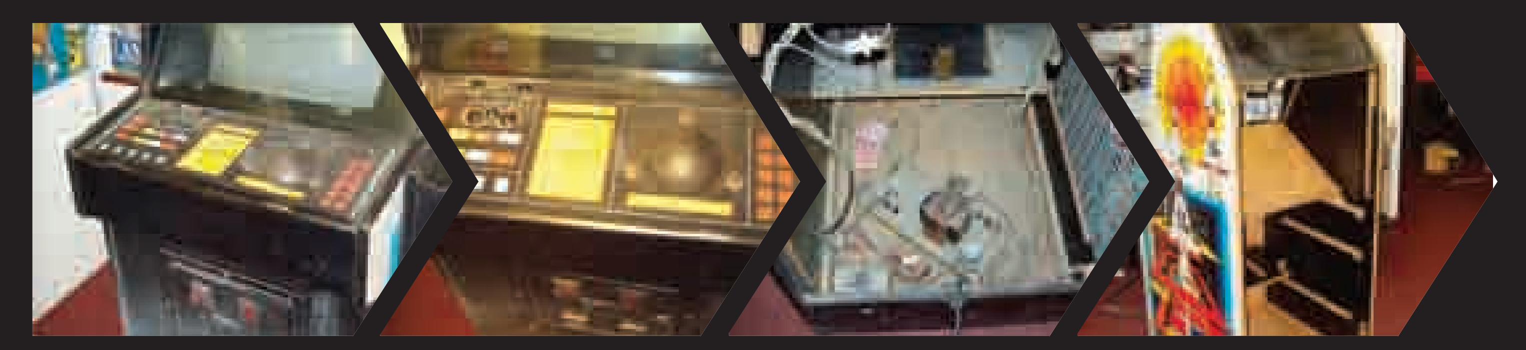
20 STEPS TO PERFECTION…

01 "This particular *Missile Command* machine was obtained from a UK seller who said it 'used to work but packed up' and he couldn't be bothered to fix it. One look told me it was a wreck but due to the wood shell being solid I felt I could polish a turd back into a classic arcade game."

02 "Here's a close-up of the control panel and it's in a right sorry state… Knackered, paint-splattered front, scratched and gouged sides. Fortunately, the actual wood wasn't too bad. Don't you just love that over-used eBay phrase 'untested, but might work'?"

03 "If the outside looked pitiful, the inside was atrocious. Here we've got a burnt monitor, faulty main board, no lamps, buggered switches, fag-burnt control panel and rust everywhere else. I'm not sure where the playing cards came from, but they didn't stay…"

04 "There was a total strip down including removal of all electronics, the loom, the screen-burnt old 1980 monitor, the lighting system, the power supply, back door, front coin area, control panel, buttons and just about everything else bar the shell's structural parts."






▼ Just imagine if you could relax in a room like this after a hard day at the office. We're very jealous.


▼ An extremely rare cocktail cab of *Robotron*. Nice.

presents its own problems. While everyone wants to enjoy playing the machines, no-one is prepared to pay a nominal fee – say, £10 – to help the actual collector who's maintaining them. Everyone simply expects it all to be for free and when people have tried to do it for a small consideration in the past, they get no end of backbiting comments.

Dom 'Rav' Escott had a great collection of cabs up for the public to enjoy but he just got so frustrated with everyone's attitude, yet they all expected him to do it. It's like paying to get into a museum for anything, though. People argue and say, 'Why should you pay to see something as old as that?' but they all want to see it – it just doesn't make any sense…

g™: How do you think retro games compare to their modern-day counterparts?

AM: To be honest, I don't think you can really compare them. It's like comparing a Morris Minor to the latest Ferrari – they're both cars, but they do completely different things. However, I do think that it's an experience to play arcade games as they were originally intended. Playing *Asteroids* for real, with really bright bullets flying all over the place through a proper vector monitor is a totally different experience to when you play it on MAME. It fact, it really annoys me when someone says, 'yeah, I've played *Asteroids* on MAME, it's really boring.' Yet when they come to my house and play the actual machine they're completely blown away by how good it still is.

g™: So when did you decide to start restoring machines?

AM: It all started in 2000 when I designed and built my own race car called the Maclean F1. One of the requirements was that I needed to make a dashboard that looked completely professional. This in turn involved looking into all sorts of weird ways of designing, printing or laminating the eventual dashboard.

I soon realised that all the skills I'd learnt for restoring wood, metal, plastics and glass could be applied to my machines. I remember Rav coming down and looking at my run-down *Missile Command* cabinet and I was telling him that I could rebuild various parts of it including the artwork. He just looked at me and said, 'you're barking'. The next time he visited I showed him the finished machine and he just couldn't believe what he saw.

It wasn't without some major commitment on my part though; doing a piece of side art for the cabinet alone took me around 20 to 30 hours to edit and make it perfect within 300dpi of where the original graphics should be. Then of course I had to print it, cover it, apply it… it just went on and on.

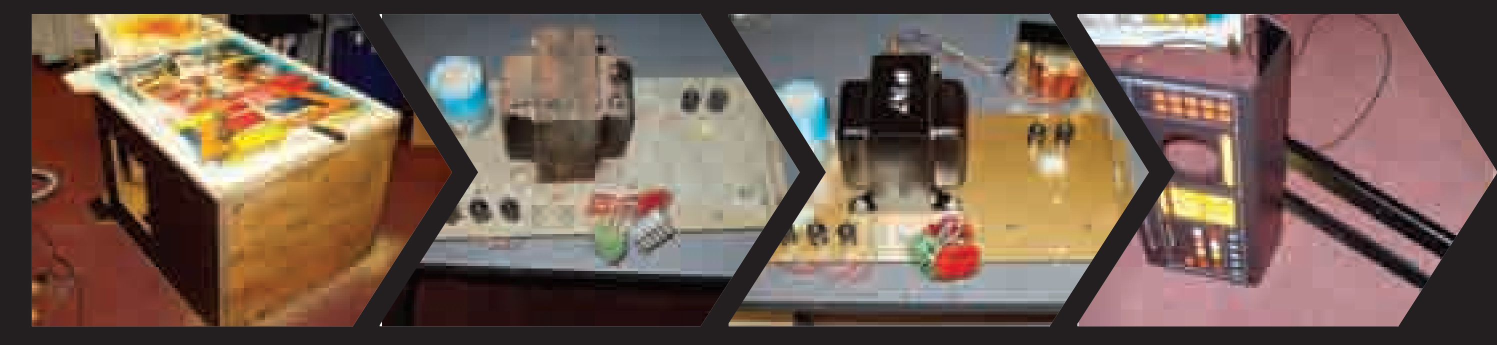
20 STEPS TO PERFECTION…

05 "Then I hoovered it out, removing large two-inch long insect chrysalis shells, plenty of spider webs and some mouse evidence. I sanded entire wooden inside surfaces, cleaned off artworked sides, filled all dings with wood filler, rubbed down all the sides until they were near smooth."

06 "I re-profiled the edges where I knew I had to fold the side artwork around to hide under the brand new black T-moulding edging strip, hoovered out result and prepared for artwork and panel work. Structurally, I made the shell more rigid as it had got a bit 'loose' over the years."

07 "The next step was removing all metal mounting strips, metal guides and other bits. Dismantled power supply, and shot-blasted the lot. Then everything was tarted up in either black or bronze to look new again before reassembly. Even if it wasn't new, at least it looked like it."

08 "Made a complete control panel with new control panel overlay, rebuilt the entire trackball assembly using a new 2004 solution to one of the original's design faults using a fixed bearing. I put in a 360 bearing instead and used new roller bearings throughout too."



I love it though, as it stops me thinking about my work. One of the things I remember when I used to write games myself was the intensity of concentration that was needed when working. There were plenty of things for me to worry about and I'd quite often find myself working through the night until eight the following morning. I've now replicated that experience by destroying an arcade machine right the way through the night and it's quite weird to go through it again. You really do get into it, though, and the end result, of course, is a perfect machine.

g™: Are any particular skills needed?
AM: Well, you certainly don't learn them overnight – it all comes down to practice, practice and more practice. Ideally you should be good at woodwork and if you're going to recreate your own art you'll really need to excel at *Paintshop Pro* or *Photoshop*. Then of course you have to figure out colour matching, printing, laminating, adhesive applying, T-moulding and so on. If you're planning on recreating a control panel, you'll need to know metal workers who can precisely replicate it within half a millimetre of the original. Then you have to learn about shot blasting so that you can restore a completely knackered fag-burned control panel to brand new in order to apply your own artwork. These skills do take time to learn but anyone can pick them up. You just have to ask yourself if you have the space, time and money to put into it.

WHY I LOVE ROBOTRON

Archer is well known for his fondness for Robotron. Here's why…

"For some reason it's a constant challenge. I think it's because you're standing there using your left arm to steer, your right to fire, you're having to use your eyes all over the screen and your ears are telling you what you're not seeing. Then of course you've got to remember to actually breathe and stand up. It's quite an experience and you'll often end up sweating after playing it for 20 minutes. It's such a physical game that no amount of mobile phone or PlayStation conversions will ever be able to recreate the real thing. It also never stops – it just gets harder and harder and harder."

g™: Where did you learn to fix machines? Were you self-taught?
AM: I've seen some other people in the UK who have done some pretty extreme restorations that made me want to go off and do something just as good, or better than what they've achieved. There are also plenty of websites out there with guys (usually from America) saying how they've solved a particular problem.

I remember seeing a person in 2001 who was restoring a *Pac-Man* machine and was trying to figure out how to colour match the machine. He ended up buying himself a colour printer spectrometer which is a device used in the paint industry for car body matching. So yeah, while you do pick things up here and there, you definitely tend to get inspired by what's been achieved by others. What I do now is put up my own photos on websites so other people can see what I've achieved. While it can get annoying answering hundreds of emails, it's definitely good fun spreading the knowledge around the community and it's something I really enjoy.

g™: How long can restoration take and what machines cause you problems?
AM: Well, the *Missile Command* cabinet that I rebuilt (see '20 Steps To Perfection') took around 100 hours to finish and was spread over quite a few months, but it all depends on what you're doing. The main reason the *Missile Command* cabinet was such a big project is because I'd completely stripped it down and rebuilt it from the ground up.

As for machines causing problems, that generally doesn't tend to happen nowadays. Woodwork, artwork and even the plastic are all things that I can now source or make myself, so it has become a lot easier than when I first started. The one thing that is always a problem, though, is replacing some of the weird electronics that certain machines have. A lot of the early vector games in particular had very strange electronics that only existed in the day and pretty much all but disappeared around 1983 and 1984 after cheaper alternatives appeared. If you want to replace a vector monitor or a vector boardset for something like *Star Wars* you're in trouble unless you can find a spare one. Then, of course, you have



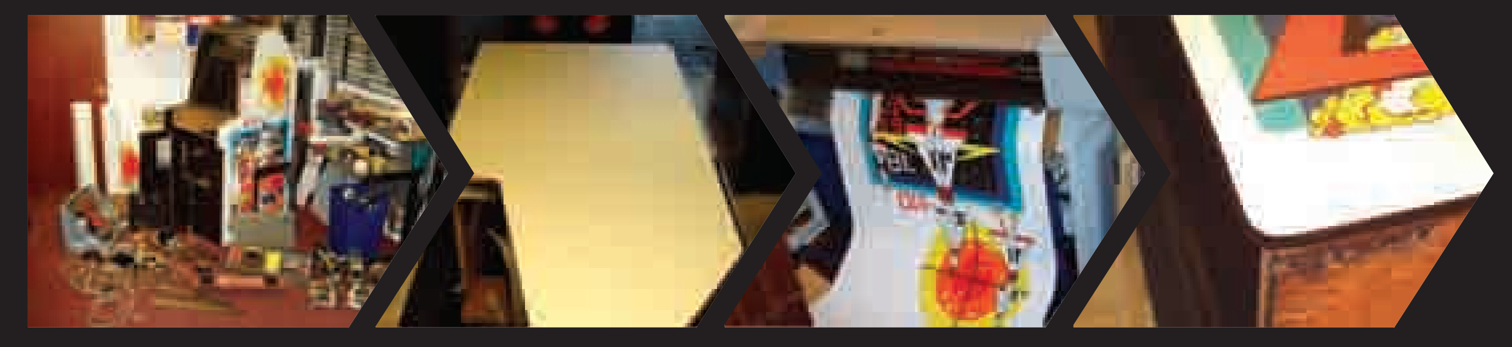
▲ A lovingly restored *Pac-Man* cabinet in all its glory. Is there no end to Archer's many talents?

09 "Made a perfect metal copy of the original control panel, and bought a control panel overlay graphic from a specialist supplier in the US. I managed to find five working LED buttons and restored the cone mounts that show through the control panel."

10 "Spent ages lying the cab flat on its side and applying an underlay of thick white vinyl to smooth over any remaining dimples in the wood, and then applied with great care my new hand-made side art prints – you only get one shot at it else it can turn into a big disaster to redo."

11 "Scanned entire side art of the machine to 300dpi, as well as what was left of the A2-sized operator's instruction sheet still mounted on the back door. I spent 25 hours graphically stitching it all together and doing all the digital image 'repairs' in order to make it as authentic as possible."

12 "You need a high-spec PC as the image file was 500Mb alone and I needed 4Gb of cache RAM for it to run smoothly. Then the colour matching tests and numerous print tests for perfection matching to an unfaded cab I have. The final result was coated in an invisible polymer layer to prevent the usual scratching and scuffing."



to be able to fix it or find someone else who can. Luckily, I can do some electronics work myself and there are a good half a dozen people around the UK who are particularly gifted at fixing certain types of machines.

g™: How hard is it to get hold of parts these days?

AM: To be honest it depends on what you're after. There are numerous American companies who supply artwork, although there are plenty of retailers out there who'll also supply you with total crap. While reproduction parts were originally hard to get hold of there are now quite a few companies springing up throughout America (although I've yet to find one in the UK) that provide anything from new control panels to monitors. These days, though, I tend to totally reproduce my own artwork and if it costs money I sell it on to someone as soon as I can. Generally speaking, nowadays it isn't too much of a problem to find parts if you're genuinely prepared to look for them.



g™: Are many people looking for restored cabinets?

AM: I wouldn't say that there's a large market, but anyone who comes around my house normally says, 'Bloody hell, I didn't even realise they made those things any more.' Everyone knows *Pac-Man*, for example, but it's quite a different thing to see a full-size six-foot-high yellow *Pac-Man* machine in someone's house. People definitely love the idea of buying cabinets, but it's the problems like where you're going to put it and how you can fix it when it goes wrong that aren't considered. While some people will often ask me for advice, they'll sometimes end up buying something off eBay and find out it's nothing like the thumbnail they saw when they finally get to pick it up.

Luckily, though, these people often tend to take the machines home anyway to restore themselves and end up becoming yet another valuable source of information in the community. It's definitely an addictive hobby, I know that much for certain.

g™: What sort of conditions do your machines normally turn up in and have there been any real horror stories?

> ***"EVERYONE KNOWS PAC-MAN, BUT THE FULL-SIZE CABINET IS DIFFERENT"***

AM: If I'm buying something in America I'll usually go there on a business trip, as I like to see the machine before buying it. You'd never buy a 25-year-old Ford Escort off eBay without looking at it first and it's exactly the same thing with arcade machines. Sadly, I've occasionally had something horrible turn up when it was freighted over as it was severely bashed during the overseas trip. While I can normally restore them with a bit of hard work it still tends to be very annoying when it happens.

Something else that upsets me is when you find a strange machine that's been sitting in someone's shed for the past 20 years and you're told it's in great condition. So you go over there and find out that it weighs an extra 10 kilos because it's full of water, has a woodworm infestation or has had an internal fire. Horror stories do exist but, fortunately, they're getting rarer.



g™: Ever had a machine you desperately wanted to fix but was beyond repair?

AM: It has happened, but usually I'll simply turn the machine into spares. I do have a very early Atari game called *Space Race* that isn't perfect as far as authenticity is concerned. I don't know of any others in the UK, and I haven't managed to get it working properly yet. The most frustrating thing is that inside the actual cabinet is a black and white valve telly, which is a TV that simply doesn't seem to exist any more. While I can fix transistor stuff, this valve system has

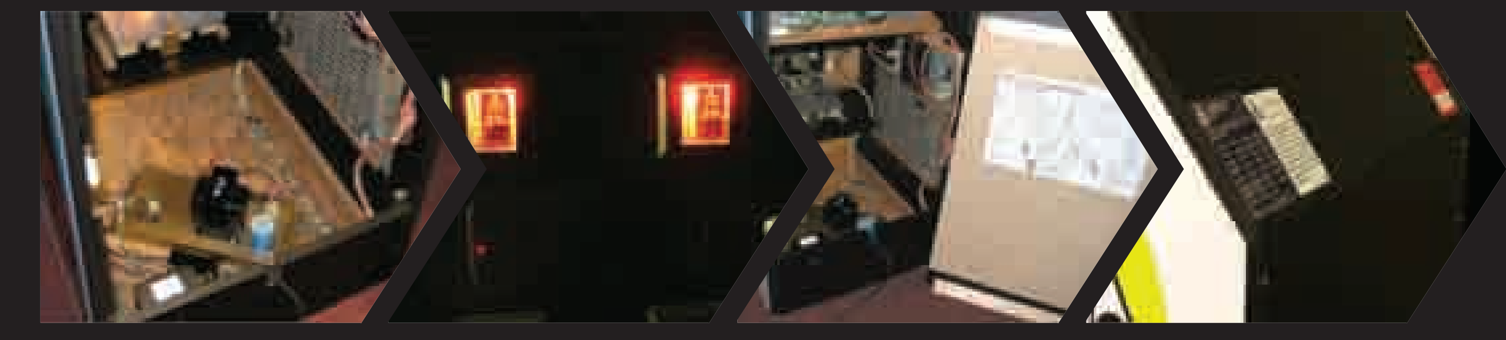
20 STEPS TO PERFECTION…

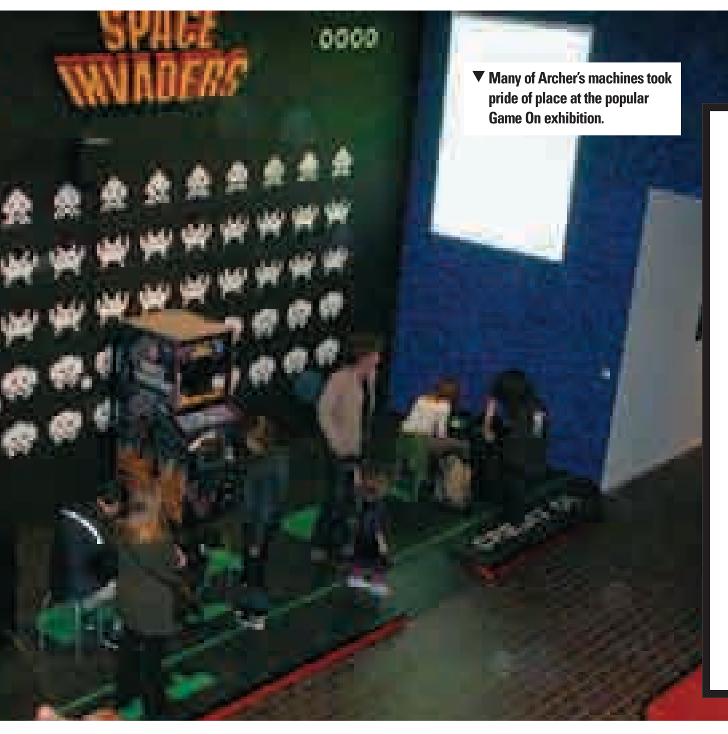
13 "Re-wired the entire cabinet with the original loom – repaired and cleaned as necessary. Re-installed the completely rebuilt original power supply. Replaced the big capacitors as they can tend to dry out after 25 years… Reinstalled the main circuit boards."

14 "Dismantled and shot blasted then powder coated the coin door and rebuilt. Custom made some tiny red transparent coin slot stickers for the new owner, Tony, who happened to be one of the world record holders on *Missile Command* back in the day, and intends to get a new record…"

15 "Made up a new back door, lower panel and top vent section, and covered all three in textured vinyl black material to look like the original. Then printed off a copy of the back door sheet instructions and fitted those back in the place they would have occupied."

16 "Made up and printed perfect copies of the original manufacturer's warning stickers that are plastered all over the original machines but get ripped off when cabs get moved about over the decades. It's the details like these that can get forgotten by lesser restorers."





▼ Many of Archer's machines took pride of place at the popular Game On exhibition.



me totally nonplussed. I guess there's somebody out there with the relevant experience to fix it, but so far I've not been able to find anyone. While I can make it work by plugging it into a modern monitor, it's not the same as being able to use the original TV that came with it.

g™: What restoration are you most proud of and why?

AM: To be honest, there's several. The *Missile Command* is certainly one that I'm very proud of, but I've also done a very thorough *Asteroids* restoration and an Atari *Black Widow*. One of my biggest achievements, though, is a *Computer Space* cabinet that I restored. It was exhibited at the Barbican Game On exhibition a few years back and I was very proud to have it there. The main reason it was such an amazing restoration was due to the sheer amount of paintwork that was involved. It's covered in a spangly blue paint and was recoated 12 times. I ended up having to employ a paint specialist who worked on custom cars and he had to get a special nozzle made because the flecks in the paint caused his normal nozzle to constantly bung up. Finally, I'm also pleased with my *Pong* machine that was also on shown at the event. While it had only been touched up, it had a plinth on the bottom of the machine that read 'Game invented by Al Acorn, Produced by Atari, Lent by Archer Maclean'. Here I was, 30 years later, proudly showing off my own version of the machine that had got me into gaming in the first place.

g™: What advice would you give to anyone wanting to pursue a similar hobby?

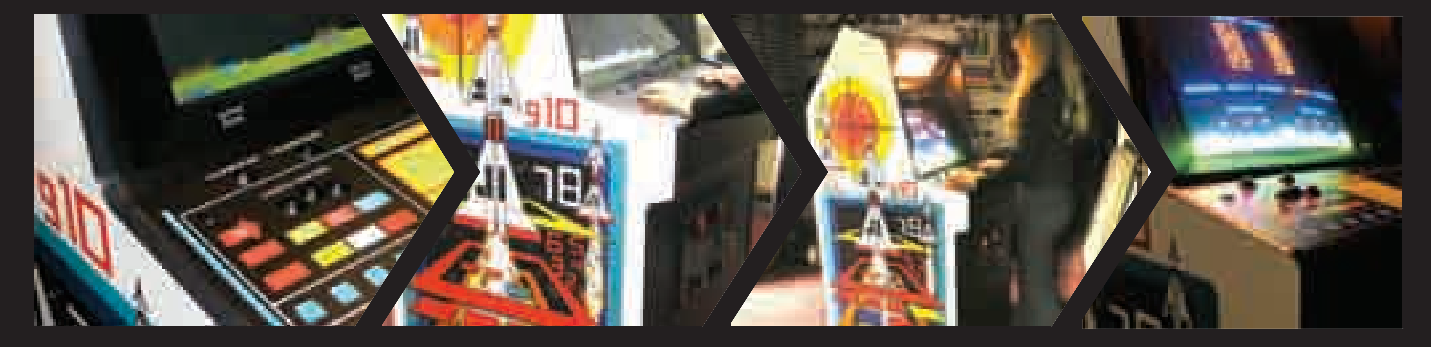
AM: If you're buying stuff, I suppose the bottom line is that if you come across a bargain and it's mint you should snap it up. It's a well-known saying but you basically get what you pay for. If you're going to get into the collection scene you have to decide whether you want perfectly mint machines, or if you're happy with collecting for the sheer authenticity of it. If you are going to restore you don't have to be a perfectionist, but you should be prepared to take the time out in order to get all the details right. It's not difficult, anyone can do it, just don't expect the first machine you buy to end up looking absolutely mint. I always say buy the best you can without going over your price, but don't buy the cheapest thing you can because it normally ends up biting you on the arse…

17 "Fitted brand new looking 1980 lo-res RGB monitor. Had a sheet of tinted glass cut to size to form a new monitor screen, then reverse printed the missile 'base names' and high score words that should be on there. Did some subtle restoration to the original marquee as it wasn't too bad."

18 "Then after a thorough check over, I fired it up with the main boards unplugged to check all the voltages were present and cutting out when interlock switches were activated. All was well, so I took a deep breath and plugged in the main board and the monitor."

19 "Amazingly, it came to life with only a few teething problems. Promptly had a game, and adjusted the trackball bearing settings to get best weighty feel and roll. Then persuaded the lady of the house to soak test the cab, while I sat back for a gin and tonic."

20 "End result – one brand new 2005 *Missile Command* arcade game that looked like it rolled out of Atari's Californian production facility yesterday. Possibly even better because it was hand made all over. Oh, and Tony has now beaten his world high-score record…"







THREE MEN IN PYJAMAS

Format: C64, Amiga
Release: 1987
Developer: Archer Maclean

Fish plop the harbour. Three men stand in the late sun. A punch to the bollocks.

Not much of a haiku, admittedly, but one that goes someway to illustrating the beauty, simplicity and impact of Archer Maclean's follow-up to 1986's *International Karate*. The game may be very Zen, but it deserves much more consideration. *IK+* is brutal, yet fair and rewards speed and accuracy while simplicity is its key.

Three fighters decked in blue, white or red face off simultaneously. Points are awarded for successful strikes. The more fancy the strike, the more points awarded, while any strike will floor an opponent with one hit. The first combatant to six points wins the round. Easy. As long as both human players remain in the top two it's easy.

Up to two human players may fight, but there are always three fighters in each match with the spare being controlled by artificial intelligence. Initially this guy is a slab of meat for you both to practise on, but as the matches progress his increased aggression makes for a worthy opponent, and one that means that you won't feel safe until both other fighters lie on the floor. Indeed, taking out two adversaries quickly and efficiently is a pleasure to be savoured and one that is reminiscent of the power felt when playing *Kung-Fu Master*, or a bar brawl starring Clint Eastwood and an orangutan. It feels good.

Each of the game's fighters is master of the same 13-move karate style, and all have trousers that will fall down whenever you follow the high-score table's advice and try "pressing T". Karate, it seems, doesn't need Jackie Chan with his head up a turkey's ass to be funny. It doesn't need a phone directory for a moves list either. It just has to make a crack to the family jewels worthy of a sound sample from *Enter The Dragon*.

Because all potential karate champs stand on the same two-dimensional plane, landing a successful attack requires the player to assume the correct distance from their opponent. Get it wrong and the intended blow will land too soon or too late (even though pixels seem to connect) and you won't get to hear something that resembles a melon being whipped as it's slammed in a car door, followed by a sorry whine. Learning the correct distance for the right attack is vital or one second you're somersaulting along the screen, joyous that you've just been awarded a brown belt, the next you're on the floor while valuable points are being fought over by those still conscious.

▼ Sure, the fighters looked better on the Amiga, but we'd have to take issue with that red suit/pink belt combo.



▼ You're not wrong 'red could do better'. That horizontal stance won't do him any favours.



DAVE LEE TRAVIS

There was a time when game music mattered so much that *Zzap! 64* magazine featured a chart, which was always fought over by two titans of the art form – Rob Hubbard and Martin Galway. Despite his dominance throughout the charts of 1987, Hubbard's infectiously camp martial arts synth-pop for *IK+* failed to even make the top ten. This was nothing to do with a lack of finesse in the track, but was more to do with the high quality and huge quantity of Hubbard's output. *IK+*'s soundtrack is a beauty, but compared to the likes of *Wizball*, *Spellbound*, *Warhawk*… the man was a victim of his own success.

By focusing on points rather than knock-outs and including a third fighter who's just as eager to win, *IK+* guarantees fights where both players can lose, while its basic controls mean that anyone can quickly learn to win. But, yes, it is in essence the same game as *International Karate*, but with an extra character and bonus rounds that are often more tense than the main event.

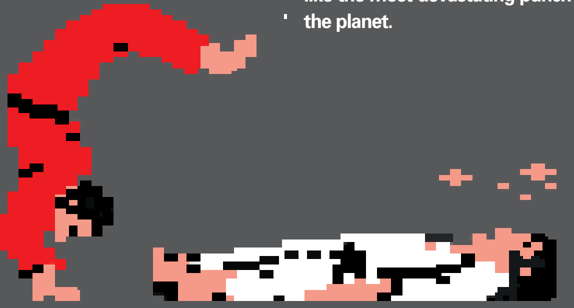
Every three rounds the current winner is forced to stand in the centre of the ring and repel attacks. Not from fist, feet or spear, but from bomb or bouncing ball. Bombs need to be knocked off screen with a perfectly positioned kick before they detonate. The balls come from both sides, bounce at various heights denoted by their colour, and can be deflected with the use of a shield. Sounds easy. Starts off easy. Then the speed of the balls or the frequency of the bombs increases, as does your required concentration until you're unaware of how you managed to survive so long. As soon as you're aware of this unawareness, you're dead.

While the bomb bonus' requirement for swift and accurate sweep kicks will leave you exasperated when you find yourself sweeping just a pixel too far from a definite strike, the ball/shield combo is a classic in its own right. When the gong of a deflection starts to blend with the constant bonging of the balls and the points start climbing, the sensation of becoming a finely tuned ball-deflecting machine descends like a warm cloak that you know could shatter at any second. Simple, but blink and you'd never think a bouncing ball could cause so much pain.

Blending karate, balls, bombs and the cry of a man who's just had his testicles detonated and setting it all against a beautifully animated backdrop makes a recipe for martial arts that has its tongue in its cheek, but is no less serious.

The beat-'em-up genre has since moved on. It has claimed extra buttons, added parries, demanded super moves and has evolved into a high-speed game of scissors-paper-stone. Looking back it is easy to see *IK+* as a curiosity more memorable for Rob Hubbard's sublime oriental electro-cheese instrumental.

Sure, it's *Pole Position* to *Virtua Fighter*'s *Burnout 3*. Progression has been made and finer games have been produced. Few have managed to capture the agony and the ecstasy of a snap to the groin, however. Few have managed to make a simple tap of a stick feel like the most devastating punch on the planet.



Greatest Retro Game Ever

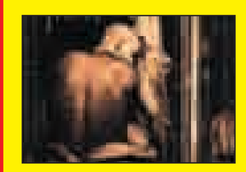
▼ Clutching his stomach, White Fighter sank to the ground. Those 17 strength-giving Weetabix had turned his insides to cement.



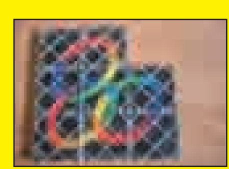
OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1987



AT THE MOVIES
Ralph Macchio modified his crane kick technique and a host of poorly sketched Japanese stereotypes got reminded that their karate was a joke when set against a horny kid from New Jersey. He did it all for the glory of love. Classic.



ON THE RADIO
Black Francis, Kim Deal, Joey Santiago and David Lovering are The Pixies and guitar rock will not have an excuse to suck until The Darkness ruin it for everyone, Scottish art students are allowed amplifiers and Nazi uniforms and Coldplay fail to be fed to wild pigs.



TOP TOY
There was something sad and possibly even poetic about the release of the Rubik's Magic. For some reason folding shiny coloured card wasn't as fun as peeling stickers off a plastic cube, and its poor sales signified a shift from traditional to electronic entertainment. We blame videogames.



CARTOON HEROES
Ex-*Three Of A Kind* unfunny girl Tracey Ullman was granted a programme to showcase her talents on the Fox network, her most memorable being the ability to share airtime with animation shorts following a family called The Simpsons. File Tracey under 'not totally worthless, actually' then.



FASHION VICTIM
They shouted EVERY other WORD and wore VW BADGES. They were the Beastie BOYS, rhymes sweet like MOLASSES. Car insignia round ya neck. Ya vandalised a RIDE, but didn't stop to CHECK? The owner lives next DOOR, now your teeth are broken. You chewing FLOOR and your face is SOAKIN'.

GREAT GAME BOSSES



PSYCHO MANTIS – METAL GEAR SOLID

Release: 1998
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: In-House
Developer: Konami

While *Metal Gear Solid* was memorable for being, well, memorable, it's the boss battle against the gimpy Psycho Mantis that sticks in the mind. The wolves that peed on the cardboard box, the cigarette smoke warning you about nearby lasers, the Codec frequency on the back of the box – everyone had their own special moment to take away from Hideo Kojima's PlayStation (and later remade for GameCube) stealth opus. Yet it's the fight against the mind-reading Psycho Mantis and the unusual tactics required to defeat him that remain *Metal Gear Solid*'s most enduring episode.

The battle began when you followed Meryl into the study and she started acting… strangely. "Do you want to make love to me, Snake?" she asked, staggering forward in a hypnotic trance. You had to keep her alive, so the only option you had was knocking her out. After that, Psycho Mantis took over and reeled off a list of stats. So far, so usual.

Then Psycho Mantis started telling you what other games you'd been playing. It was a shock to hear a videogame character tell you that you'd been playing *ISS Pro '98* but that's exactly what this mind-reading boss did. It was little more than Psycho Mantis reading a list of Konami games on your memory card but it was damn creepy all the time.

He then told you to place your controller on a flat surface. That done, he moved the pad using his mind. Some players jumped out of their seat, some immediately knew it was merely the DualShock vibrating on cue, most missed out altogether by believing Mantis' instructions to be a cheap trick and refused to let go of the pad. The GameCube remake added even more little touches, such as the laughing Kojima picture on one of the study's walls (as shown in the screenshots on this page).

That would have been enough to ensure Psycho Mantis had his place reserved in the videogames Hall of Fame but the best was yet to come. When the actual fighting started, it was almost impossible to hit Mantis. He'd move out of the way of all your attacks and gunfire while flinging the study furniture at you using his mind powers. "I can read your mind!" he would shout, taunting you.

Just how the hell did you beat him? Easy – when the screen turned black and 'HIDEO' appeared in the corner, you had to switch pad ports. Mantis couldn't get a reading on you and you could start hitting him with your trusty FAMAS. If figuring out the solution was pleasing enough, Mantis' frustrated cries as he realised he couldn't read your mind any more were truly satisfying.

In desperation, Psycho Mantis revived Meryl and had her attack you. You had to knock her out again but when she next woke up, Psycho Mantis ordered her to use her pistol to shoot herself. You had to move quickly to prevent Meryl's 'suicide' and knock her out again. The battle shifted from a straight one-on-one fight to preventing Meryl's death as well as keeping the pressure on Mantis – another boss pattern to consider as if the fight hadn't taken enough unexpected U-turns already.

Eventually, Psycho Mantis fell and gave his final soliloquy before showing you the hidden door that allowed Solid Snake to continue. You just had to remember to plug the pad back into the first control port before pushing onward…



▼ Psycho Mantis was a ruthless host of Ann Summers parties.



▼ Yeah, yeah – we've seen that Blaine fool do it. You're on tip-toes, aren't you, flyboy?

TIME TO DIE

One aspect that is often overlooked in the technical pad-swapping awe is the calm that follows the battle. As Psycho Mantis removes his mask and shows his scarred face without eyes or a nose, he bonds with Snake because they have past traumas they don't like to revisit. When he says he only went along with Liquid Snake's plans to kill as many people as possible, Snake stops Meryl from hitting him in anger. It was an unusual moment in an unusual boss battle – the main protagonist seeing eye-to-eye with someone who finds redemption just before death. Saying this scene echoes *Blade Runner*'s classic rooftop moment with Rutger Hauer would probably be giving it too much credit but it's still a cute tribute to Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic.

WHAT WERE THEY THINKING ???

GREAT GAME, STRANGE CONTROLS

SMASH TV

Release: 1991-1994 **Format:** Various Home Systems
Publisher: Various **Developer:** Various

Conversions can be tricky things. It's bad enough when you're trying to squeeze amazing sound and visuals into a machine that's clearly not up to the task, but you'd think the people porting a game from one system to another could try to make sure the controls were perfectly emulated. Sadly, this wasn't the case for most of the home computer versions of *Smash TV*.

The *Robotron*-inspired shooter had used a dual joystick control method in the arcades – one stick for movement, the other to fire – and only the C64 and SNES were able to emulate it with any degree of accuracy. The SNES used its four face buttons to control firing, while the C64 went one step further and allowed you to use a second joystick – though you needed to make sure both sticks had sticky feet… While these versions accurately captured the arcade experience, other formats weren't quite so lucky.

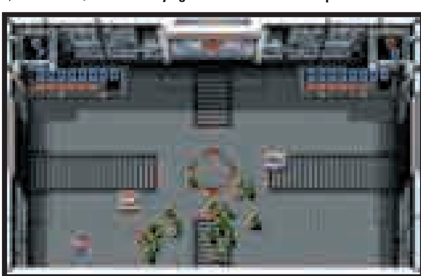
The Amstrad and Spectrum versions limited you to simply firing in whatever direction you were facing at the time. While this did work (the Spectrum version even got a *Crash* Smash) it didn't really feel like proper *Smash TV*. Then there was the Mega Drive version, which allowed you to use two alternative methods of firing yet still failed to accurately capture the original game with any success.

The Amiga, Atari ST, Sega Master System… the list went on, and while quite a few versions were praised for the hectic gameplay, the lack of an authentic control system was often never mentioned.

While it's quite possible that you actually enjoyed your version of *Smash TV*, imagine how much better it might have been with arcade controls.

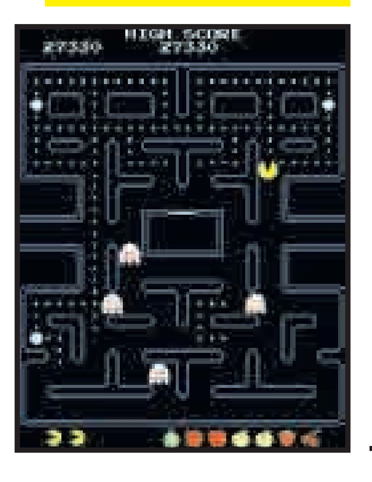


▼ It looks fun, but it's like trying to steer a cow down a spiral staircase.



P·A·C··M·A·N

Release: 1980
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Namco



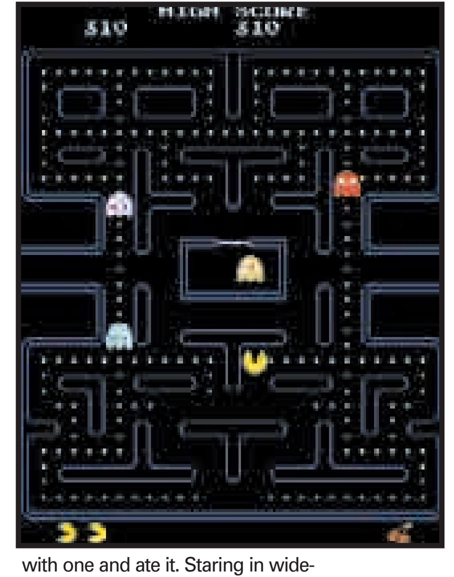
WACCA WACCA WACCA...

***Pac-Man* may seem painfully simplistic by today's standards, but in our minds it will always remain a classic.** Granted, it lacks the more interesting mazes of *Ms Pac-Man*, and the yellow blob is now starting to show his 25 years, but he's still responsible for one of our finest videogame moments and for that we'll forever salute him.

The magic happened while waiting for our nan to finish bingo. Spying a *Pac-Man* machine in the corner we blagged ten pence and clambered onto a handy bar stool. One pressed Start button later and we were merrily munching our way round the colourful maze, eating Power Pills like they were going out of fashion. Suddenly, disaster struck… we'd run straight into Pinky and lost one of our precious lives.

Starting our second life, everything became clear, and although ghosts were soon homing in on us, we pulled out what some forums would no doubt call l33t skills and skilfully evaded them. Somehow, though, we found ourselves being slowly herded into a corner and the prospect of losing of another life loomed before us. With desperation setting in we made Pac-Man gobble up a large Power Pill and the tables were suddenly – magically – turned…

Quick as a flash, every ghost turned blue and started to move away from us. Spurred on by this sudden swing, we quickly caught up with one and ate it. Staring in wide-eyed wonder as a little pair of eyes returned to the ghost's spawn point, we failed to spot that one of the remaining ghosts had once again became a threat. Within a few moments we'd lost yet another life. Dammit.





Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

RISING RISTAR

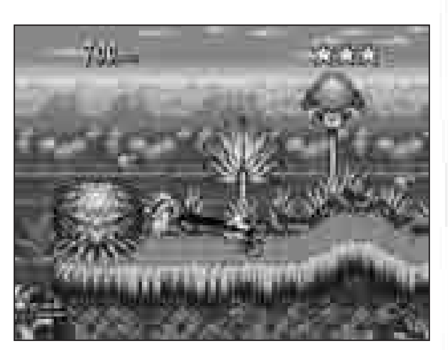
Dear games™

I just want to say a huge thank you for praising the Mega Drive classic *Ristar* when you reviewed the *Sonic Mega Collection Plus* in issue 28. I remember when I first plugged the cartridge in my Mega Drive like it was yesterday. From the moment Ristar said "Come on!" when the Sega logo appeared I knew I was in for a treat.

I was wondering if there is any way that you could feature *Ristar* in an upcoming issue of the mag. I'd love to see it in the Games That Time Forgot section and a full page would be superb. It was such a fantastic game but it puzzles me why Sega never released a sequel. A 2D version on the PSP's lovely screen would look stunning and I'm pretty sure plenty of other Mega Drive owners and **games™** readers would agree.

Daniel Heath, Surrey

You're right – *Ristar* is an excellent game and definitely deserves a page in the near future. But while a sequel would be nice, we'd much prefer *NiGHTS 2*.



Someone's really feeling the love for old stretchy limbed Ristar today.

ARCADE QUEST

Dear games™

A while back I was in North Yorkshire for a wedding. While I was there I happened to visit a pub in a village called Stillington and was delighted to find a fully working tabletop version of *Donkey Kong*. I put a pound in and played five games, amassing a grand total of 10,000 points.

A month later I was in a pub in Donegal; while I can't remember the name of the pub now, I do remember the games it had. There was *Operation Wolf*, *Bomb Jack*, *Space Invaders*, *Black Tiger*, *Rygar* and *Hogan's Alley*.

Back when I was a kid my parents would pack us off to Lahinch and the town had a massive arcade. My favourite game of all time was a game called *Darkstalkers* by Capcom. If any readers from my neck of the woods remember any arcades I'd love to hear from them.

Ian Maher, Co. Tipperary, Ireland

There's some nice finds there, Ian. It's getting increasingly hard to find old-school arcade machines nowadays but they are around if you're prepared to do a little digging. Bournemouth pier, for example, has a little arcade that has *Lucky & Wild*, *Alien Vs Predator* and *Raiden*. If any readers know of hidden gems then let us know.



Seen any old-school arcade gems recently? Let us know, why don't you?

ALL-IN-ONE

Dear games™

As an avid (and somewhat hardcore) gamer who enjoys retro as much as modern gaming, I have found myself constantly expanding the range of consoles and games that I own.

I find **games™** is a fantastic source of information on the best games available for all the different consoles and computers of yesteryear. To be honest, though, having to wade through all the back issues in the hope of finding some information out about my latest acquisition is a real pain in the arse. How about a pull-out feature, listing all the articles, reviews and previews from all back issues?

Darren Staples, via email

Glad you find the magazine so useful. Your best bet for getting a list of all our old retro articles is



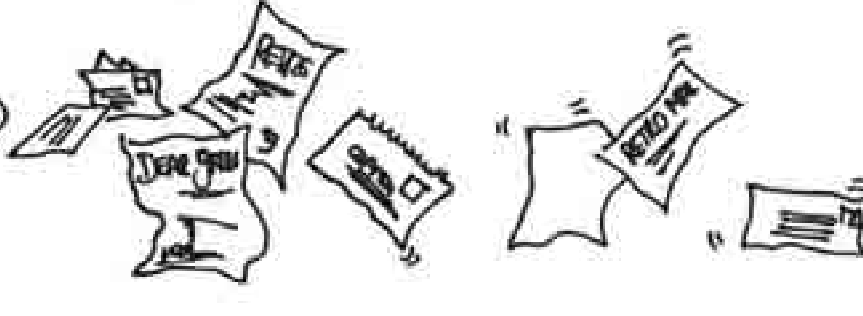
Videomaster – the system all the badly dressed family can enjoy.













Waiting to jump on the colour bandwagon didn't harm Nintendo.

to visit www.totalgames.net/retro. All the articles and features from each mag are there, and though a couple are currently missing the site will be updated very soon. If you prefer your retro knowledge in a more portable form, you might still be able to find a copy of our Retro compilation book in the shops.

COLOR ME BADD?

Dear games™
I've got a question about the early handheld games consoles. Sega brought out the Sega Game Gear with a colour screen and then Nintendo brought out the Game Boy Pocket, which had a black and white screen.

It wasn't until 1998 that Nintendo brought out the Game Boy Colour. Did Nintendo not have the technology to make colour screens in the early Nineties while Sega did?
Harry Perkins, via email

There's no reason why Nintendo couldn't have released a Game Boy Color earlier than it did, but we're quite sure that it would have been plagued by exactly the same problems as every other colour handheld at the time (most significantly, a very short battery life due to the drain on the machine's power). And let's face it, in the grand scheme of things a black and white display didn't do the Game Boy any harm.

ROLE WITH IT

Dear games™
I just wanted to congratulate you on the excellent feature on run-and-gun games in issue 29. It was very, very interesting. Well, okay, I'm actually lying there. I probably would have really enjoyed it if I had any interest in run-and-gun games but I still loved the idea of the actual article. Is there any chance you could run a similar article but base it on RPGs instead? I've only just got into retro gaming and I'd like to be able to buy some games without wasting my money on rubbish.
Roxanne Platt via email

There's been quite a lot of interest in these features so an article all about RPGs may happen. Hell, we could easily write one that's just about SNES RPGs. Now there's an idea…

ACETRONIC? ACE!

Dear games™
Many years ago my dad bought us a videogame console made by Acetronic. It was like the Atari 2600 in that it accepted cartridges and sported a very similar (and probably highly illegal) selection of identical games. The control pads had very thin joysticks that didn't auto centre and featured several rows of buttons that made them look like a TV remote control. There were even overlays for certain games so you could see what each button did.

I wondered if you had ever featured this machine before, or if you have had any similar requests about it? I distinctly remember playing *Space Invaders* (or its equivalent, anyway) for hours without being killed but not much else about the games catalogue and would love a trip down that particular branch of memory lane.
Paul Terry, via email

You've unearthed a few memories there… While we never owned an Acetronic, we do know a few people who used to have one. There's been a surge of interest in more obscure older computers and consoles, so we'll do our best to compile a feature about the rarest finds. In the meantime, if there are more 'leftfield' machines out there that you'd like to know more about, write in to the usual address or drop us an email.

UNKNOWN ALLSTAR

Dear games™
I really love the mag, and I am hoping to enlist the help of your cool and groovy Retro section, as well as the enlightened people who read it, of course.

We found a console my brother and I used to play as kids. It's still in its original box and has caused us a great deal of head scratching. It's a Waddingtons Videomaster Allstar. The problem is, I really cannot find any reference to its existence; even a letter to Waddingtons drew a blank. I have spent hours sending emails and trawling eBay and collectors' sites but I still can't find anything about it. What I do know is that it's from the mid Seventies, was battery operated and plays four different variations of *Pong*.

This is where it all started for me, and I would love it if someone could help me out. Well, what I really want to know is if it's worth anything – PSPs ain't cheap, you know.
Les Johnson, via email

Well, if even the machine's manufacturer can't help you it must be a real rarity. We have to admit we're stumped by this one but we still reckon that it won't sell for nearly enough to cover the cost of a PSP. Although no price has been officially announced, some websites are claiming that Sony's spanky new handheld will set you back around £180. You'll need to dig up a couple of obscure consoles to scrape together that sort of cash…

A MUG'S GAME

Dear games™
Just thought you might like to know that I sat down and read your excellent Ocean article (issue 30) while enjoying a lovely cup of tea. I've had this mug for over 14 years and reading through the feature bought back a lot of fond memories (of Ocean, not the mug).
I G Maloney, via email

That's a very fine mug and no mistake. Why not head visit the shop at http://theoceanexperience.co.uk and you could get yourself fully kitted out. Oh, and get us a *Wizball* T-shirt while you're at it.



We don't know if the contents of the mug are retro or not. As a rule, we don't recommend drinking 20-tear-old tea. It mings.





C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS' GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60



ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-40

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore VIC-20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (depending on model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£50-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£60-90
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£80-180
Super Grafx	£200-300





NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-150 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right then, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classic games to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to buy. Hopefully, we can help.

Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of top games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). This month we're taking a look at some of the best and priciest shoot-'em-ups for the PlayStation.

Gradius Gaiden

Estimated Price: £10-20

Developer: Konami

Before Treasure's *Gradius V* came along, this was generally considered to be one of the highlights in the *Gradius* canon. Like *Gradius V*, *Gaiden* borrows plenty of ideas from the previous games but somehow creates a more *Gradius*-like experience that's bound to please fans of the series. While the original printing is quite hard to come by now, the PSone Books version can be bought for less than £12. Bargain.



Harmful Park

Estimated Price: £80-110

Developer: Sky Think System

Considering *Harmful Park* is one of the rarest shooters on the PSone, it's amazingly easy to get hold of. Like the Saturn's *Radiant Silvergun*, there are a few websites that have several copies in stock and it occasionally pops up on collector's favourite eBay. It's perhaps best described as a cross between the excellent *Parodius* series and the PC Engine's wonderfully cute *Coryoon*, so if you're a fan of quirky shooters and have £100 lying around why not try tracking it down?

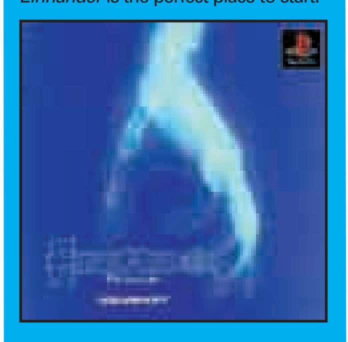


Einhander

Estimated Price £1-5

Developer: Squaresoft

If Square Enix could lay off the RPGs for a while and release a sequel to this outstanding shooter we'd be very happy indeed. Featuring a similar visual style to *R-Type Delta*, *Einhander* is a class title that can now be picked up relatively cheaply. The Japanese version is quite hard to acquire (a shame, as the box art is lovely) but you can get the American version for less then £20. If you're after a tough and glorious looking shooter, *Einhander* is the perfect place to start.

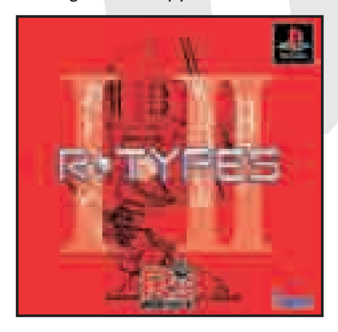


R-Types

Estimated Price: £10-30

Developer: Irem

Yes, it's available in PAL land, but purists will go for the faster NTSC versions every time. *R-Type* remains one of the greatest shooters ever made, and while its successor is frustratingly difficult at times, its inclusion makes this pack fantastic value for money. It's also very easy to get hold of, so if you're looking to lose yourself in Irem's twisted, biomechanical creation you shouldn't have too much trouble tracking down a copy.

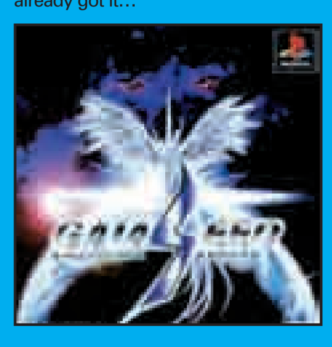


Gaia Seed: Project Seed Trap

Estimated Price: £50-80

Developer: Techno Solei

Gaia Seed is yet another hard-to-find PSone shooter that has become increasingly tricky to get hold of in recent years. Despite looking like a 16-bit shooter it's packed with plenty of old-school gaming goodness and is a thoroughly enjoyable blaster. It's certainly not the best shooter for the PlayStation, but if you're a hardcore collector this is a definitive purchase. Hell, you've probably already got it…



Toaplan Shooting Battle 1

Estimated Price: £50-80

Developer: Banpresto

It's getting increasingly tough to find, but if you're looking for some classic old-school shooters you're left with little choice but to buy this fantastic compilation. For your hard-earned cash you'll be picking up superb conversions of *Tiger Heli*, *Ultimate Tiger* and *Twin Cobra*. All three titles play like helicopter versions of *Raiden* and are as addictive as hell. It's a lot of cash but if you divide the price by three it becomes a little more bearable.



Soukyugurentai

Estimated Price: £17-40

Developer: Raizing

We've declared our love for the excellent Saturn conversion of *Souky* in quite a few issues of Retro, so it's inevitable that the PSone version gets a mention. While it features worse slowdown than the Saturn version, it does include some fairly decent FMV cut-scenes and a fourth ship that Saturn owners didn't receive. It can also be picked up at a much more reasonable price, so if the purse strings are feeling the strain you may want to choose the cheaper option.



Zanac X Zanac

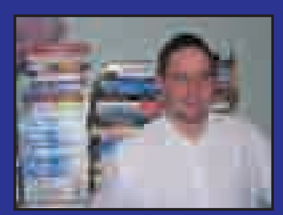
Estimated Price: £40-65

Developer: Compile

The PSone may not have as many shooters as the Saturn, but it does have some highly desirable titles – and *Zanac X Zanac* is one such example. The game's relatively expensive thanks to its late release, but Compile went to town with one of its final titles and delivered a very impressive shooter. There's a great selection of weapons available, a superb two-player mode and a great scoring system. This disc even includes three versions of the original NES *Zanac*.



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION



THIS MONTH'S RETRO COLLECTOR IS MAT ALLEN, A 30-YEAR-OLD IT OFFICER FROM EPSOM. MAT HAS GAMES THAT YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER EVEN HEARD OF, LET ALONE ACTUALLY PLAYED. WHAT'S MORE, HE'S GOT BLOODY THOUSANDS OF THEM. GUESS THAT MAKES HIM THE DADDY…

Q) How long have you been collecting?
Since getting the C64 way back in 1984 I've not sold anything I've got my hands on, so in essence I've been collecting at the same time as I've been playing.

Q) How much is your collection worth?
God knows. Five figures, easily. There's over 1,000 C64 originals to consider, plus a multitude of rare 2600 games, almost complete Neo-Geo Pocket sets, a complete Atari 7800 collection, rare Vectrex items, a stash of valuable VIC-20 bits, a complete N64DD set and so on.

Q) How did your interest in collecting come about?
Specifically, I'd put it down to becoming part of the Digital Press *Guide* team but, as mentioned earlier, I've really been 'collecting' since I got into computers. I was asked to help out with the new C64 section [of the Digital Press *Guide*] that was being added in mid-2000. Evidently I did such a good job that I was 'rewarded' with taking the helm of the section by myself in the end.

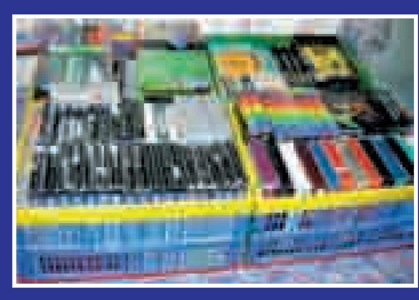
Q) What's the most money you've spent on a single item?
It was for a complete copy of *Ultima: Escape From Mount Drash* for the VIC-20, which cost $2,600. There are only three complete copies known to be out there so it's a real rarity.

Q) What's your most prized possession?
A certain VIC-20 game certainly comes in close. There's also the *GamesMaster* golden joystick I won way back in 1993. If pressed for one item, though, I'd go for Jeff Minter's Spectrum. He gave it away as a prize at one of the Llamasoft meets and I was lucky enough to get it.

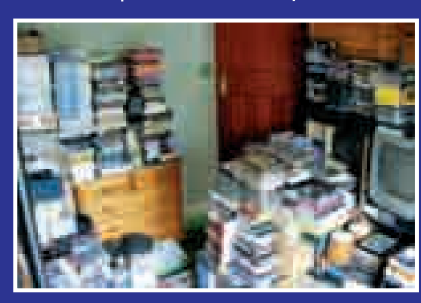
Q) What's the most highly desirable item that you haven't found yet?
A tricky question, mainly because everything I can think of I know someone who has it, but needless to say, it's finding a copy for myself. There are still a few high-profile Atari 2600 titles left to get such as silver label *Gravitar* and *Waterworld*, *Video Life* and *Gauntlet* (no relation to the arcade machine). If anything I'd really love to get one of the Vectrex prototypes such as *Mail Plane* or the baseball game, but I know I'd also have to fork out a lot of money for them.

Q) What sources do you use and have you ever found a real bargain?
Sadly, in my area car boots and so forth are sorely lacking in terms of retro goodness compared to the spoils I hear of from collectors up north. Today most of my acquisitions are done either via private sale, trading online or eBay. I got a copy of a cartridge game for the C64 called *Satan* for the princely sum of five Australian dollars; until a recent eBay auction turned up another copy, this was the only one known to be out there.

Q) What does your significant other and family think of your collecting?
Thankfully, the girlfriends I've been with have been okay with the whole games-playing and collecting side. One of them certainly had no complaints at all as she was a games player and collector herself. My family, on the other hand, are not so tolerant. That said, should I snuff it suddenly they'd not have a problem selling off all the good bits for a lot of money!



We'd tell you that these C64 carts are just a tiny part of Mat's collection, but the picture below makes that fairly obvious.



That down there is a complete collection of N64DD software. Bet you've never seen one of those before, eh?

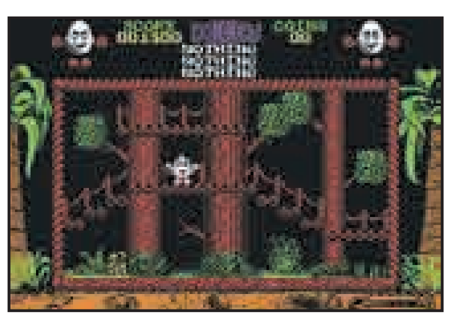


NEXT MONTH IN RETRO

If you're finding the wait for next month's issue of Retro too much to bear, just read this month's section again – very slowly. Or you could get all flustered knowing that in a few weeks you can read our exclusive Dizzy feature and learn about the ZX81…

See you then!

ON SALE 16 JUNE



Egg-based adventuring takes centre stage next month as we get all Dizzy.


eMag

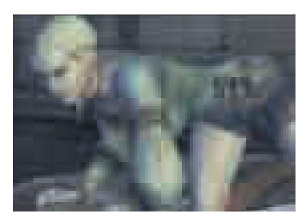
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



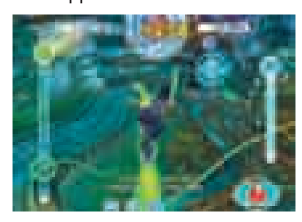
HAUNTING GROUND

Capcom's latest scare-'em-up might be more *Clock Tower* than *Resident Evil*, but that doesn't make it any less exciting. In fact, there's something rather compelling about playing a defenceless girl as opposed to someone armed to the teeth.



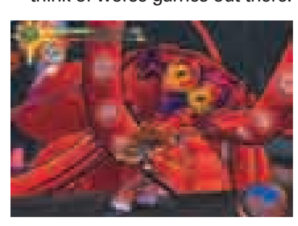
EYETOY: ANTIGRAV

At last, an EyeToy game that doesn't require our ugly faces to be displayed on our massive plasma screen for all to see. True, it might prove that the EyeToy technology isn't quite as perfect as it needs to be, but it's still fun wrapped in an innovative shell.



SAMURAI LEGEND: MUSASHI

Square Enix's follow-up to the PSone's much underappreciated *Brave Fencer Musashi* might look beautiful, but it's damn difficult underneath (not to mention slightly repetitive). Still, we can think of worse games out there.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

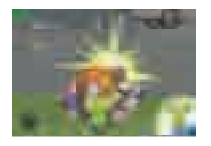
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

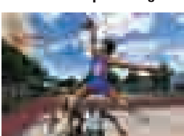
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports Big	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	In-House	The Prince returns, darker than ever before
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Silent Hill 2	Konami	In-House	The high point of Konami's survival horror series
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

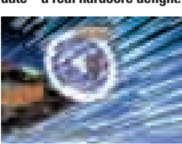
Katamari Damacy
The Japanese release of Namco's ball-rolling sequel is only a few months away – time to dust off the original.



NBA Street 2
Sorry, EA, but customisable courts and GameBreakers don't make *NBA Street V3* better than the previous game.



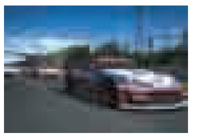
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness
Nippon Ichi's first attempt to reach a Western audience is also one of its best games to date – a real hardcore delight.



Ico
Damn and blast – haven't we told you enough times that this is one of the greatest games to ever be created?



Gran Turismo 4
Certainly not perfect, but still the best example of the series… unless you hate realistic racers, of course.











XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

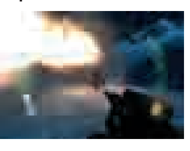
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. The 'special edition' Crystal console is now widely available from stores across the country.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	The Xbox's most popular game just got even better
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	As comprehensive an online racer as you're ever likely to find
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best Splinter Cell yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Pandemic Studios	A great game first, a great *Star Wars* game second
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Ion Storm	*Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages? Sounds good to us…

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

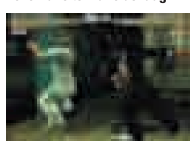
Deus Ex: Invisible War
A fitting tribute to the late, great Ion Storm, even if it's not quite as good as its PC predecessor.



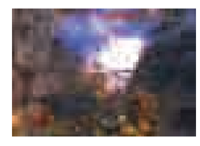
Out Run 2
Elegant, stylish and just as playable as the original game – Sega's revamp of the *Out Run* series goes down a treat.



Def Jam: FFNY
Call us crazy, but the opportunity to repeatedly punch Sean Paul in the head never fails to make us laugh.



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
A change in direction for the *Oddworld* series, but one that delivers some fine gameplay in the process.



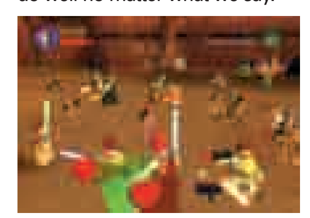
Halo 2
Still keeping people busy over Xbox Live, even though we've long since moved on to *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect*.



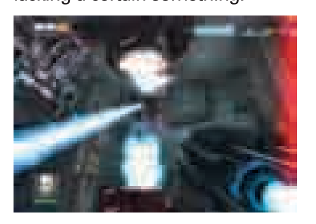




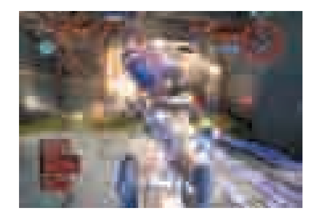
LEGO STAR WARS
Eidos' block-based effort has created a distinct love/hate feel with us – some feel its overly simplistic nature undermines the *Star Wars* ethic, while others refused to stop until they'd found every last stud. Still, it's bound to do well no matter what we say.



PARIAH
Would you hate us if we said that *Pariah* wasn't the greatest FPS ever made? Probably not. If we then went on to say it had a lot in common with *Halo 2*, though, you might get the gist. But we've said too much. A solid effort, but lacking a certain something.



UNREAL CHAMP. 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT
Maybe it's just us being old-fashioned, but Epic's latest console take on the *Unreal* franchise just doesn't feel right. Is it the third-person viewpoint? The lack of charm? Or just the fact that it's not actually much fun to play?



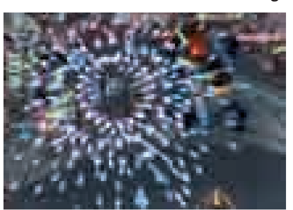
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



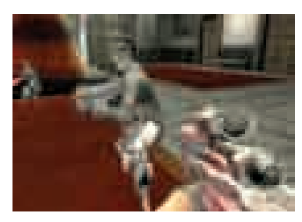
CHAOS FIELD

And so the GameCube's descent towards becoming the next-generation Dreamcast continues with the release of yet another vertical shoot-'em-up. Yes, so it's fun for a while, but we can think of many examples of the genre that are more exciting.



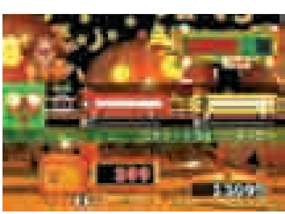
TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

TimeSplitters always seemed to suit the GameCube best, so it's no surprise that the third instalment comes off pretty nicely on the console. One small problem though – it's not playable online. Can't have everything, can you?



DONKEY KONGA 3

Are we the only ones who feel that the *Donkey Konga* licence has already lost its shine? We loved it originally, but slowly our interest has waned – if only because this latest effort doesn't have enough decent tunes to make it worthwhile. Shame.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date
3 May 2002
Media
3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
WarioWare: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

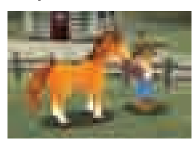
WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Tales Of Symphonia
An engrossing slice of the *Tales* series that draws you in with beautiful visuals and keeps you hooked for hours.

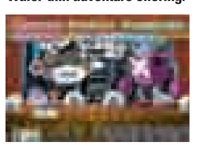
Zelda: The Wind Waker
It wasn't too short, the sailing sections weren't boring and the cel-shading was great – get over it.



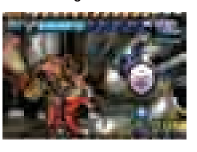
Harvest Moon: AWL
We can understand why so many people overlooked this, but it deserves your attention – if only for the sake of the cows.



Paper Mario: TYD
Need a good looking turn-based RPG in your life? Then look no further than Mario's wafer-thin adventure offering.



Viewtiful Joe 2
A refinement of everything great about *Viewtiful Joe*, despite being possibly one of the hardest games ever.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

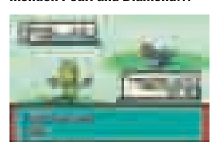
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor IMPORT	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire

Haven't caught them all yet? Best get a move on then – *Emerald*'s on the way, not to mention *Pearl* and *Diamond*…



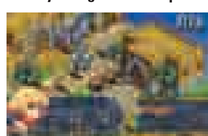
Wario Ware: Twisted!

A new take on the *WarioWare* formula with some hugely entertaining results that'll have you smiling for hours on end.



Final Fantasy Tactics Advance

The ultimate holiday game – go away for a week and you might stand a chance of getting about halfway through this GBA epic.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

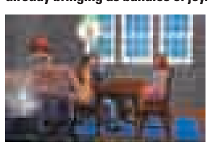
TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

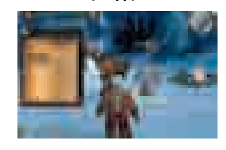
The Sims 2

And so the *Sims* gravy train rolls on, with the first of what will no doubt be many add-on packs already bringing us bundles of joy.



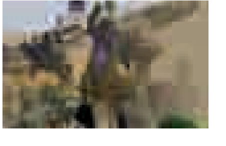
World Of Warcraft

If only we could retire and actually spend all our time playing *WoW* – now that would make us very happy indeed.



Rome: Total War

'How many people on screen at once?' we said when this first came out… and we're still hearing the same question now.



PLAY TO WIN

COME JOIN THE GAMES™ ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY – WE'VE LAID ON EVERYTHING YOU'LL NEED TO ENJOY SOME OF THE VERY BEST PC MULTIPLAYER TITLES AROUND

Got a decent PC? Like playing online games? Then you've come to the right place. Thanks to Jolt Online Gaming, the **games**™ PC gaming servers have been offering some fine examples of competitive action and we don't intend to stop just yet. If any of the games below take your fancy then you'd better get in there quick; we'll be changing everything around next month, so it's your last chance to sample some of the delights of playing against your fellow readers on these beauties…

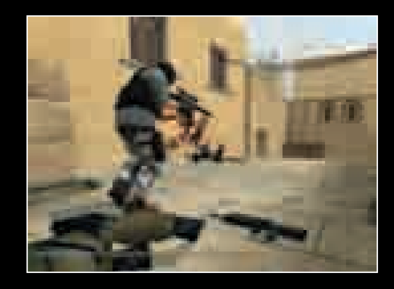
BATTLEFIELD: VIETNAM

How could we not kick things off without visiting the *Battlefield* series? This is one of our favourite online titles for the PC, and you'll be able to enjoy a bout or two of Conquest on **gamesTM01**.



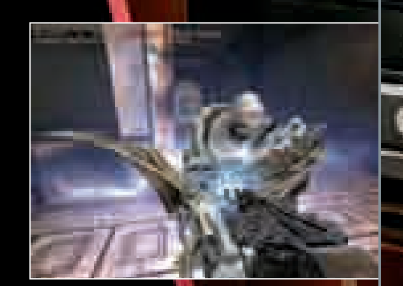
COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

The newest addition to our online schedule (albeit as an update to an old classic), *Source* is on **gamesTM02**, playing host to a range of round-based games for all you counter-terrorist types.



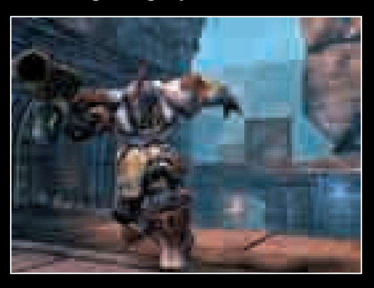
PAINKILLER

It's all-out carnage over on **gamesTM03** thanks to the rampaging delights of our eight-player *Painkiller* maps. Remember, who needs strategy and skill when you can just pin your enemies to the wall with a Stake Gun?



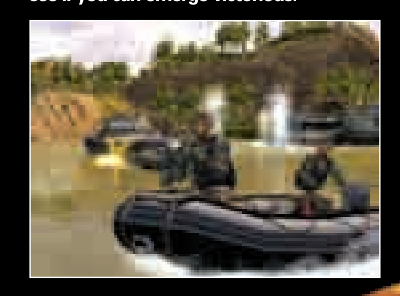
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

A brash, in-your-face blaster compared to the other titles here, *Unreal Tournament 2004* has a wealth of different modes to choose from, but we've set **gamesTM04** to Onslaught to get you started.



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

Novalogic's jungle-based shooter has become quite a favourite with the online community, so we had to include it. Try Advance And Secure on **gamesTM05** to see if you can emerge victorious.



Getting onto the **games**™ servers couldn't be easier – simply call up the available server list within any of the above games, find the relevant **games**™ gaming server and, providing the server isn't already full, click to enter. Our servers are still available to all with no restrictions but we may introduce a password system in the near future to ensure readers of the magazine get the most benefit. Be sure to check back here each issue to find out what the password might be so that you can access our selection of titles – we don't want you to miss out, do we?

JOLT ONLINE

The official **games**™ servers are provided by Jolt Online Gaming, the number one gaming server provider in Europe. Jolt's servers have been seen by many as the benchmark in online gaming performance in Europe since 1999.

Jolt believes that online gaming is about more than just logging on to a random game server and playing with strangers. By fostering a strong relationship with its community and giving gamers places to hang out, Jolt has become host to one of the largest and most vibrant gaming communities in the world – you can join today by visiting http://forums.jolt.co.uk

Jolt also offers a variety of personalised game server packages catering for everyone from small clans looking for a private practice ground to large clans and organisations who want the prestige of their own branded and totally dedicated server boxes running multiple public game sessions with integrated admin tools, anti-



cheat software and access to a dedicated support team. With prices starting at £12 a month, Jolt's servers are affordable to all. For more information visit www.jolt.co.uk


eMag

NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

Thanks to this year's E3 it's not so much a case of knowing what's in the next issue of **games™** as it is deciding what we're going to have to leave out – even with 180 pages to fill, there's no way we'll have room for everything. Nevertheless, we'll make sure you see the best of everything there is.

MORE… REVIEWS

Forget the fact that summer's coming – we'd rather stay in front of our TVs than risk getting burnt, stung or made to go on a picnic. Thankfully, there's plenty to be grateful for; if the likes of *Destroy All Humans!*, *Killer 7*, *Guild Wars*, *Psychonauts*, *Boiling Point*, *Conker: Live And Reloaded* or *The Matrix Online* take your fancy then come along. If not, well, there's plenty more titles to tickle your fancy.

MORE… FEATURES

A big month, next issue, obviously headed up by whatever Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony has to show off at E3, as well everything we could get our hands on that was kept under wraps. On top of that, we'll be jetting off to visit Flagship Studios and discovering exactly what life after Blizzard is like; talking to some of Square Enix's finest about *Kingdom Hearts 2* and *Dragon Quest VIII*; grilling Eiji Aonuma for information about Nintendo's next instalment of the *Zelda* series; and, on the Retro front, digging deep into the egg that is Dizzy.

Please note: Due to circumstances beyond our control, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it. Probably words. And some pictures.




NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
E3 2005:
THE FALLOUT
ON SALE 16 JUNE 05
We came, we saw, we played lots of games. Join games™ for the definitive look at the best (and worst) of the biggest industry event of the year
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Enough of what we think – this is where you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

IT'S A COMMON occurrence for a very vocal community of gamers to jump aboard their forum of choice and complain about the current state of the industry: smaller independent developers becoming absorbed by larger outfits, 'indie' retailers suffering at the hands of the high-street chains, and sequels dominating the marketplace. However, things really aren't as bad as some people like to argue.

Sure, *FIFA Street* has been insanely popular and there aren't any first-party Xbox games scheduled for release after *Conker: Live & Reloaded*. I also agree that it's an absolute tragedy that Oddworld Inhabitants may call it a day (in the games industry at least) due to poor sales of *Stranger's Wrath*. But there is a silver lining – I would argue that 2005 has been the best year so far for this generation.

Since February, I have bought a staggering ten Xbox titles in three months, which is nearly as many as I bought last year. Who can argue with the diversity and quality of *Jade Empire*, *Knights Of The Old Republic II*, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, *Stranger's Wrath*, *Dead Or Alive Ultimate*, *Midnight Club 3*, *Republic Commando*, *TimeSplitters 3*, *Unreal Championship 2* and *Doom 3*?

Granted, all but one are from established brand names or licences, but I'd say that the quality of these particular titles easily compensates for any dazzling lack of originality. Actually, scrap that – *Stranger's Wrath* is one of the most brilliantly unique titles I've ever had the pleasure of playing. With the arrival of my PSP (and subsequent purchases of *Ridge Racers*, *Hot Shots Golf*, *Lumines* and *WipEout Pure*) my credit card has taken a severe beating…

Rambling aside, if you look hard enough there's a sizeable silver lining to that grey cloud some people see as the games industry. How can you argue with quality like this and the fact that much of what is said in this letter arose from a conversation I had with a 70-year-old granny on the state of the games market? That alone almost makes up for *FIFA Street*…
G Hughes

games™: We like letters like this. Not only is it the old, 'things aren't as bad as they seem' letter that does the rounds every once in a while, but it also includes this mysterious old lady, who, with seemingly nothing better to do, pops up in games stores around the land. We suspect that she's some kindly spirit that appears only in times of gaming woe. We'd like to meet her, we really would.

I'VE NOTICED A trend among some games designers to make their products ferociously difficult. I'm all for a challenge but particular trends, such as not having adaptable difficulty levels, have started to take the enjoyment factor out of gaming.

I was recently thinking of buying *Devil May Cry 3*, having completed both the previous instalments. Now, leaving aside perfectly justifiable criticism of the second game, part of the reason I enjoyed both titles was a desire to see what the game designers had thought up next. Having read reviews in your magazine and online, pointing out the fearsome difficulty level, I will not be purchasing it at all. This is in no small part due to my last similar purchase – *Ninja Gaiden*.

This game was so monumentally difficult to play that I never got beyond the second boss –

"AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, **MANY PEOPLE CONSIDER AGE RATINGS ON GAMES TO BE MERELY GUIDANCE** TO THE AGE REQUIRED FOR THE **USER TO BE COMPETENT AT THE GAME"**



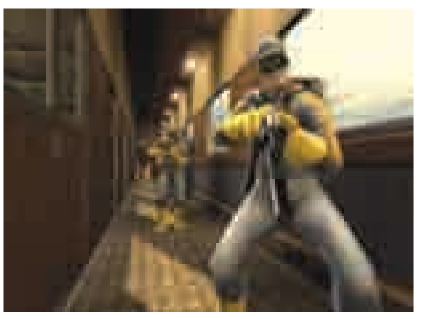
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You're right – despite all the nay-saying there *is* a lot of good stuff around at the moment. *TimeSplitters 3*, for instance, is awesome.



Sure, *Ninja Gaiden*'s hard, but is it too hard? We eat gravel for breakfast, so nothing's too hard for us.

a truly evil horseman and teleporting mage combination. I will never purchase another *Ninja Gaiden* game no matter how good the reviews are, as spending numerous hours getting slaughtered without progress (surely the purpose of gaming?) is not fun.

I understand that some players relish an old-school, hard-as-nails challenge and I support a horrible difficulty level as an option for those who like to sweat blood to get their kicks. For the rest of us who find it less than satisfying to buy something we can't finish, at least give us the option to tone down the difficulty.

Timothy Peun

games™: This isn't some recent development in gaming – just go back and play some of the classic games featured in the Retro section if you want a real challenge. Pitching difficulty levels in games must be one of the hardest undertakings for developers – make it too easy and you face the wrath of gamers who want value for money, make it too hard and people like you complain. We tend to side with making games challenging, because £40 would be a lot of money to pay for something that you could just waltz through in a few moments.

BEFORE READING YOUR 'Watch With Mother' article (issue 30) I had never considered the difficulties parents face when selecting appropriate games for their children. As an employee of a games retailer, I had always pointed to the classification on the box as a point of reference, and sometimes been stumped when parents or children asked why the game had been given that classification – after all, you can't play every game. But I have to confess that my ignorance hinders the parent as much as their ignorance does.

A potential solution occurred to me. As I understand, developers and publishers often submit a short video of the most gruesome or controversial scenes within a game to ELSPA et al, to save them time of having to play through it. Could this video not be included on the game disc for 12+ games? It's no extra cost to the developer or publisher if the video is already made. Sales assistants in stores could inform parents of the video as they purchase the game, and allow them to return it if they feel the game is unsuitable.

A warning message about the video could pop up when the disc is loaded, along with copyright and health warnings, and all the classification bodies would have to do is occasionally advertise the fact that these videos exist. The video, only being a few minutes long, would cost the parent nothing to watch. I feel it could help to combat parent apathy towards screening games, and if everyone fulfils his or her small role, there's no-one for the *Daily Mail* to point the finger at.

Martin Power

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

Why dont great texts get £100 vouchers?!
games™: All those vouchers for just seven words? Do us a favour.

I have an MSX,got rid of the cassette based games yrs ago,but kept the konami cartridge games,have about 15 to 20 ranging from yie ar kung fu 2 and nemesis and salamander.
games™: That's amazing – can we come round your house and have a look?

How do u become a video games journalist?
games™: Luck, knowledge and passion for gaming. And spelling – don't forget the spelling.

Just read the 'stolen' review" Ha hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha! Nice one that writer! Shame about using the same screenshot twice though.
games™: The game was so bad it made our eyes break. Hence the mistake.

Hello. Please can u help.I have had my XBOX 4 just 2 years now.Its suddenly started 2 go wrong. The disctry opens during gamesplay & then keeps openin
games™: Looks like you're going to have to call the Xbox Customer Care Line (0800 587 1102). They should be able to organise a repair for you.

How good is the sony psp and should i own one
games™: Some of us have some reservations about build quality, but we are largely impressed. *Ridge Racer* and *WipEout Pure* have brought some much-needed handheld gaming love into games™ towers.

zucchini?
games™: Tsk, courgettes.

GT4 sucks ass.
games™: No it doesn't. It's one of the finest racing games ever. What's more likely is that you're just not very good at it.



Are we too harsh on the N-Gage? We'd argue that the sales figures speak for themselves.



So it's okay for kids to shoot a man in the face, but not to see some rendered boobies. Thanks, parents, for the moral guidance…

games™: While this might help to suggest that the industry is doing all it can to educate retailers and parents alike, we don't think that this would make an awful lot of difference – an '18' rating on the packaging, complete with a general description of the content ought to suffice. Unfortunately, as the next letter illustrates, it's not that straightforward…

THIS ISN'T THE first letter you've received on the subject, and it won't be the last, but I feel the need to express my views on the controversial subject that is games censorship.

I've been working in a videogame store since July last year, and have been exposed to more blind ignorance than I can bear. As far as I can tell, many people merely consider age ratings on games to be purely guidance to the age required for the user to be competent at the game. Certainly this is how I used to view it, until the BBFC starting putting official ratings on them.

Now technology has advanced to the point where gamers are essentially interacting with a movie, so a user can now be taking part in a horror movie (like *Resident Evil*), a gangster film (like *GTA*) or even (soft-core) porn (like *Playboy: The Mansion*), along with all the horror, violence and imagery that would be associated with an 18-rated film. As such, age ratings should be considered with the same force as when they are used on adult films or pornography. However, this is not the case.

To illustrate the power of this ignorance, I recall a woman I was serving recently who was renting games for her son. I pointed out that two of the games he was renting were 18-rated, but she simply retorted, "Yeah, it's okay, he's with an adult". But when I said that the games included *Playboy*, she quickly became shocked that he could be possibly be viewing pornography. Maybe it's just me that sees this as hypocrisy.

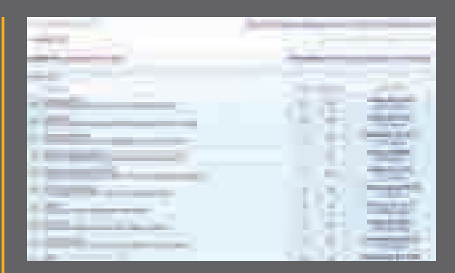
I fail to see the distinction in buying an 18-rated game and an 18-rated film. Parents should view these age restrictions in the same way, and take a more active role in knowing what their children are taking part in. For some parents (mine included) even age ratings on films were to be ignored so this will mean no change, but I wish my parents hadn't let me watch *Nightmare On Elm Street* at eight years old, as I still remember the nightmares.

For progress to be made, there needs to be more awareness on the significance of the age restrictions on games. Otherwise, we'll be seeing sensationalised claims litter the front of the *Daily Mail* for the rest of eternity.

Lloyd Husbands

games™: You see? This is the problem facing the games industry. It can try to educate parents, it can warn them about the perils (or potential





FROM THE FORUM

WHY ARE WOMEN IN GAMES ONLY IN THEIR BIKINIS…?

perils) of videogames and even when the industry acts responsibly, adult-themed games still end up in the hands of minors. Ultimately, it's the responsibility of parents to police the games that their children play, and as we have seen, many of them choose to ignore the warnings and allow their kids to play pretty much whatever they like. With parents acting so irresponsibly, it's hard to think what can be done do to counter this. Answers on postcard to the usual address? Nice to see another dig at the *Daily Mail*, though…

WE CAN ALL probably agree that the entrance of Microsoft into the console market has been a good thing. It's brought extra competition that has kept prices down and standards high.

I would have thought, therefore, that a magazine like **games™** might like to encourage competition, especially in the handheld market which, let's face it, has been kept pretty stagnant by the domination of a single company. Yet, where the N-Gage is concerned, bad news seems to be good news in this magazine. You always find space to report its design faults or its poor sales, but there's never space for its increasing list of successes such as *Pathway To Glory*, *Colin McRae*, *Ghost Recon* or the QD redesign.

Heavy weather was made of the original N-Gage's design faults. Fair enough, they were massive. However, on my list of massive design cock-ups, the fact that you had to carry around a torch in order to use the original GBA comes pretty high – portable indeed! Even the SP with its added light is pretty poor; try putting an N-gage QD next to an SP – it's like comparing a torch to a car headlight. Of course, this was never mentioned, just the QD's small screen.

In issue 30 you were sounding the death knell of the N-Gage QD, so, before it goes, let's give it some credit. Nokia did a great job of listening to initial (well-deserved) criticism and released a great redesign. The QD is lighter than an SP, is perfectly pocket-sized and has a screen that you can view even in direct sunlight. Nokia has spared no effort in supporting it with games, and *Pathway To Glory* in particular is one of the best portable games I've ever played.

If you're right and the N-Gage is about to bow out, then I only hope that Nokia has not been totally put off by the rough ride that you and others in the games industry have given it so that it doesn't try again. The games industry will be all the poorer if there's only Nintendo to service the youth market, and Sony the older market.

Simon Mitchell

games™: Admittedly, we've always been a little on the negative side, certainly when it comes to the original N-Gage – it was, after all, a pretty confused product that neither satisfied the needs of the gamer or the mobile phone customer. Similarly, we were a little dismayed that the GBA launched without a backlit screen, rendering it all but unplayable in certain conditions. However, whereas Nintendo quickly addressed these issues, the QD – while much improved – remained a confused product that wasn't really marketed at gamers nor embraced by them. Rumours abound that Nokia is to launch a new N-Gage at E3, and while we suspect that the company still doesn't know who the phone is aimed at, we'll look at the new one in the hope that it really does meet with Nokia's lofty claims that it can create a great phone that's also a great gaming device. Still, at least you're not championing the Gizmondo.

"THE GAMES INDUSTRY WILL BE THE POORER IF THERE'S ONLY NINTENDO TO SERVICE THE YOUTH MARKET AND **SONY THE OLDER MARKET"**

Shalashaska
I'd like to think this forum is a tad more sophisticated than the rest of them, yet I seldom hear any complaints regarding the games industry's portrayal of women. You'd be forgiven for thinking that negative gender stereotypes exist only in poor games – ones that make their living off image rather than gameplay. But this is not the case – take the highbrow piece of 'art' that is *Ico*. It's essentially just another boy-rescues-princess tale, and although some might say that the protagonist would not be able to progress without Yorda's help, this is akin to saying women were appreciated in the Fifties because they cooked their owners' dinner. Then there's the 'girl power' games such as *Tomb Raider* or *Red Ninja: End Of Honor*, where a strong female protagonist is used under the false pretence that the developers recognise that girls can kick ass too, the truth being that they are only being fetishised to appeal to a young white heterosexual male audience.

Fox
Hmm, as I sit here trying to think of games in which women are portrayed fairly I see the box for *BloodRayne*… Games still seem to be made to appeal to guys despite the fact there are a large amount of female gamers nowadays. Look at games like *DOA* – need I say more?

Bondvillain2k
Maybe there just aren't enough people saying that it's gratuitous. There aren't many vocal women in the industry, and by that I mean women developing and reviewing. Starting that sort of revolution is easier said than done, but I'm fed up with being thought of as weird when I buy games that have barely clothed women on the cover, when I'm buying them for the less obvious *gasp* reasons.

toythatkills
Games are predominantly played by males, so if you want to sell more games, you appeal to the largest demographic: males. It's money, is all.

Shalashaska
It's the inherent master-slave bipolar disparity that I find disturbing. If you want to call one of the girls in the back of **games™**, fine, enjoy your wank in the solitude of your own fantasy. Problems arise when you carry those internal fantasies into everyday life and fail to contemplate what you're doing – ie, you play *The Legend Of Zelda* and don't realise how patronising the concept is. Now I know that these games are aimed at a particular market. I know why the media is constructed the way it is. What I wanted to know was: does anyone care? Does it honestly bother you? If not, why not? To those of you who do find it disturbing, I don't think there's nothing we can do. There's nothing we can do *easily*, but if you really care we could start something.